

Chapter 1

"Remus is really teaching Defence next year?" Sirius asked. He and Harry had just been dropped off by the Grangers after returning from King's Cross.

"Yes" Harry watched as his godfather frowned "I thought you would be happy. At least he will be better than Lockheart or Quirrell"

"I don't doubt it"

"And he is a good man?" When Sirius didn't respond at once, Harry tugged on his top "Uncle Mike?"

"Back when your parents went in to hiding, James and I thought he might be the spy"

"But Pettigrew..."

"I know" Sirius shook his head "Yes - Remus is a good man, and I will feel a lot better about your safety if he is in the school next year"

"Then what's wrong?" Harry asked. Sirius paused for a moment, then transformed in to a big, black dog. Harry watched as the dog prowled up to him, sniffed, then backed away and returned to human form.

"You hugged both girls, Susan and Claire, but not Arnold. And you washed your hair with... orange shampoo this morning" Sirius smiled at the look of surprise on his godson's face "Now imagine what someone who can do that without needing to transform, and to whom such a thing is second nature, would be able to detect" Harry stared at him for a moment, then his eyes went wide.

"Lupin?"

"Yes"

"But... he will know your scent"

"Yes"

"So I have to drop out of school?" Harry exclaimed.

"NO!" Sirius laughed at the horrified expression "But it means that either I need to change my scent, or mask it some how"

"OH" Harry said "Is that bad?"

"Well - no. It's pretty easy" Sirius paused "Except.."

"Except what?"

"It needs to be cast on anyone I have had a lot of contact with" He looked over at the mantelpiece above the fire. Harry followed his gaze to a picture of Hermione, Harry and Sally.

"Oh"

"It is up to you Harry - we can either do this with their consent, or without. But we do have to do it"

"But..." Harry started, then looked up "You think we should tell them?"

"As I said - it is up to you" Sirius sat down, and smiled at him "Do you trust them?"

"Yes" The speed of Harry's response didn't surprise him "But Susan might not know occlumency, and Min's parents can't learn it"

"We can take care of that" Sirius smiled again "There are pendants that will protect their minds from attack, and I can teach Susan if it is necessary" Harry nodded in agreement.

"Are you sure you want to do this? And that it is my choice?"

"Yes, and yes" Sirius looked thoughtful "I know I have more to lose, but... well you remember what I said before, about James and Remus"

"Yeah?"

"If you do this without telling them, it will damage your friendship. And even if you tell them, but not the reason behind it, the outcome will be the same" He paused "And Hermione will work it out anyway"

"That's true" Harry stood up, and started pacing back and forth "Okay. If we can find the pendants, and ensure Susan can protect

her thoughts, then we should tell them everything" He turned back
"But only under those conditions"

"Harry..."

"I mean it. Minnie and Sally mean a lot to me, but I can't lose you - even if it means never seeing them again"

"You could tell them, but not tell their parents"

"No" He said softly "I can't ask them to lie for me - not even for this" Harry looked solemn "Either we make sure your secret can be kept, or I leave Hogwarts and we find another school"

"Okay" Sirius nodded, already thinking about alternatives "But it won't come to that"

"Mum! I am just going out to Harry's"

"Okay dear. Don't forget your wand"

Hermione smiled - two years ago, before her Hogwarts' letter came, her mother would have told her to take a coat or a hat.

"I guess it serves the same purpose" She smiled to herself, then she picked up the paper she had been reading, and headed out.

Five minutes later she rang the doorbell at The White House (as they had taken to calling it), and was surprised when it spoke to her.

"Sorry, but we aren't here at the moment. We should be back around four o'clock. You can leave a message, Miranda, but since we already know it's you, don't feel like you have to"

She stared at the doorbell for a moment, then burst out laughing.

When she had calmed down, she looked at her watch and, seeing it was five to four, she sat down to wait.

"Min?" Harry stopped short as he saw his friend sat down on his front door step "How long have you been waiting?"

"Ten minutes longer than your doorbell said I would be" She smiled
"Nice spell, by the way"

"Thanks" Sirius said "And sorry - we got delayed. Would you like to come in for a drink?"

"I can't, I'm sorry" She held up the paper "I only came to see if you knew about this" Both Harry and Sirius looked at the front page of The Daily Prophet.

"SIRIUS BLACK SPOTTED"

"Wow" Harry said "That's... interesting"

"Indeed" Sirius added "Do you mind if we keep this?" Hermione shook her head.

"I just thought you should know" She started to walk away, then turned when Harry took her arm.

"Could you and your parents come over at 8ish tonight? There is something we need to talk to you about"

"Okay - I will ask them" She looked at them for a moment "Is it serious?" When they both started laughing she stared at them as if they were crazy.

"Sorry" Sirius said when he had got himself under control "Yes - it is ser... it is pretty important. Sally and Susan will be here too"

"Okay - I will see what I can do" She smiled again, then set off back home, wondering what had been so amusing about the question she had asked. The two males watched her go, then Sirius turned to her godson.

"We really have to get over that joke"

"I know" Harry smirked "But imagine what will happen when they find out your middle name" He burst out laughing again, causing Sirius to glare at him "Sorry. I promise I will never tell them, L..." Sirius couldn't help smiling as Harry collapsed in to giggles again.

"Susan - do you know occlumency?" Sirius asked.

"I learned when I was younger" She replied "And after hearing about Dumbledore and Harry, I have started practicing again"

"Do you mind?" He asked, holding up his wand.

"Go ahead, but gently"

"Legilimens" For a moment he thought the spell hadn't worked, then he saw a glimmer of light in the distance. He moved toward it, and soon found himself stood in a crypt, bathed in torchlight. He looked around, then saw Susan coming towards him "This is good" He said with a smile "I guess I would go through the doors, or the tombs?"

"If you can get by me" She waved her hand, and a sword appeared
"This is the part I need practice in"

"Okay" Sirius blinked, and the two of them were back in the front room "You pass" He turned to Hermione's parents "Now - I can't teach you two the skill, but Harry and I have a present for you" Harry handed each of them a box, which they opened to find a small crescent shaped charm on the end of a chain.

"Occlumency amulets?" Hermione asked "Why?"

"Harry and I have something to tell you, but it has to stay a secret. It is something you can not tell anyone, otherwise..."

"You won't see either of us again" Harry said quietly.

"Harry!" Sally turned to him.

"I don't want to go, but there wouldn't be any other choice" He moved so he was sat next to her, and kissed her gently "You know how much you mean to me love, but this is out of my control"

Claire looked at her husband, then they both nodded and turned back.

"We will go along with you, as long as it is not criminal"

"It isn't" Sirius paused, then stood up "How much do you know about the night Voldemort was vanquished?"

"Harry's parents were under the Fidelius charm, they were betrayed by Sirius Black and Voldemort came" Susan said.

"Then Sirius took Harry and vanished, until you rescued him" Sally continued.

"Well - that is not entirely true" Harry said "But before we continue..." He held up his wand "I solemnly swear that everything I am about to say is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" His wand flashed, then a moment later, Sirius followed suit. Then he put his wand down, and took a deep breath.

"James had three friends - Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew. Now, for reasons I will come to, Remus could not be the secret keeper" He saw Hermione's parents frown in confusion "The Fidelius Charm hides someone in plain sight, just as long as one person can keep the secret. It is the ultimate in home security, providing the person - the secret keeper - stays loyal"

"Which is how Black betrayed them?" Claire asked.

"Kind of" Harry smiled "Remus wasn't suitable, which left Peter and Sirius. Sirius was my godfather, and my father's best friend. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for my parents, even if it meant his death"

"Then how did he end up betraying them?" Sally asked.

"He thought he was too obvious a choice" Sirius stood up and started pacing "Everyone knew James would chose him, so he suggested that he act as a decoy" He stopped pacing and faced them "Sirius could go around the country, staying one step ahead of those chasing him, while the real Secret Keeper could go in to hiding to protect James, Harry and Lils"

"Pettigrew?" Susan asked in a faint voice.

"The rat-bastard was a spy, and he went running to Voldemort" Harry said in an angry voice "Then he vanished, leaving Sirius the blame" He looked over at his friends "Any questions so far?" Before his friend could reply, Claire looked curiously at Sirius.

"Mr... Black?" Everyone turned and stared at him in stunned silence.

"Well - at least I know where your daughter gets it from" He smiled
"What gave it away?"

"We are told this is top secret, to the point where you will both flee the country if it is revealed, and you tell us that Sirius Black isn't the cold blooded traitor we were lead to believe he is. I could only guess what Fudge or Dumbledore would do if they found out Harry's guardian was an infamous criminal"

"But you believe us about the innocent part?" Harry asked.

"Cast a spell" Susan and Hermione said together. Everyone watched as Harry levitated the sofa, and Sirius levitated Harry.

"What does that mean?" Arnold asked.

"If they were lying, their magical cores would have collapsed, and they couldn't do what they just did" Sally said with a smile "And sorry about yelling at you - I understand"

"My Aunt Petunia - the woman who would get me - hates magic" Harry said with a sigh "Imagine Draco adopting Hermione, but worse" Both girls shivered at the thought "So if its a choice between losing Sirius or fleeing the country..."

"I know" Sally kissed his cheek, then turned to Sirius "Don't think me rude, but why tell us now?"

"Because of Professor Lupin" Hermione said, then looked over at Sirius "You will need to cast a masking spell of some type?" Susan and her parents turned and stared at her, then turned back and stared at Sirius questioningly.

"He told you?" Sirius looked down at his godson "You told them?"

"Yes" Harry nodded "Sally is the second smartest witch in our year, and Minnie is the second smartest in the school. Do you really think that after watching Remus for a year they wouldn't figure it out themselves?" He looked up at the other adults "Professor Remus Lupin was a very good friend of my parents, and is a werewolf"

"Pardon me?" Claire said in surprise.

"He was bitten when he was a child" Sirius said "But he is only dangerous one night a month, and since the advent of Wolfsbane Potion, he isn't a danger at all"

"And this relates to you..." Arnold trailed off "He can SMELL you?"

"A werewolf is basically a dog, just with incredibly heightened senses" Hermione replied "Even in human form, a person infected by lycanthropy has an unusually good sense of smell"

"So he will be able to smell you on Harry?" Arnold frowned "And the girls?"

"Pretty much" Sirius smiled "And with the news that someone is running around pretending to be me, well - if Remus tells Dumbledore - and he will - then it will be all the excuse he needs to take Harry away from me" He looked around "I know we have sprung a lot on you at once, and that doesn't include the spell I will need to cast on each one of you, but... well we both need to know now if you will keep our secret" There was a few minutes of silence, then Claire stood up.

"I admit learning you are a wanted fugitive is surprising, and that a creature that I have always thought of as a dangerous killer is going to be teaching at my daughter's school, but I am willing to trust you"

"Thank you" Sirius smiled.

"That goes for me too" Susan added "Plus I know Sally has never been happier" She smiled at her daughter, who blushed.

"Thanks mom!" Everyone laughed.

"Okay" Sirius continued with a smile "Here's what we have to do..."

Chapter 2

Sirius looked at the letter in front of him, and snorted in disbelief.

"What's up?" Harry sat down opposite him.

"Minister Fudge has requested the pleasure of our company this afternoon" He read further down the note "Along with Sally and Hermione"

"Did he give a reason?" Harry looked interested.

"He wants to discuss various security arrangements in regard to you, now that Sirius Black has resurfaced" He smirked.

"And the reason Sal and Min are invited?"

"Because the fact that you and Sally and Minnie are best of friends has, apparently, made it all the way to the halls of the mighty, and Minister Fudge thinks Black could target them to get to you"

"Oh" Harry paused "This is going to be a very strange year, isn't it?"

"Oh yes"

"Minister Fudge will see you now"

The four of them stood up and walked in to the Minister's office.

"Mr Whiteheart, thank you for coming. And Mister Potter, Miss Granger, Miss Perks - welcome"

"Thank you for asking us" Sirius said with a smile "Now - you wanted to talk about Harry's safety while Sirius Black is running around?"

"Yes" Fudge picked up a folder "Well - it seems likely that, from what you have said in the past, it is likely he will be coming after Harry" The Minister glanced over at the kids "Sorry - that was more scary than I thought it would be"

"Don't worry, sir - I am fully aware of all the dangers posed by this man"

"Okay. There are going to be arrangements for protecting the school, and other public areas, but since we are all agreed that Mister Potter is..."

"A really big target?" Sally asked with a smirk.

"I wouldn't phrase it quite like that, but yes" Fudge smiled "I would like to assign you some guards, for day to day protection"

"What would that involve, Minister?" Sirius asked.

"Six guards on a rotating 24 hour shift, plus an extra six guards any time you go out. All of them will be first questioned under veritaserum, to ensure there won't be any traitors" He watched as Sirius and Harry looked at each other "We will also extend a similar arrangement to Miss Perks and Miss Granger"

"Minister Fudge - I am not sure that would be the best idea" Sirius frowned "Our home is under the Fidelius Charm, and has extra protections over it. If we had to have a group of Aurors there..."

"You think it would compromise your safety?"

"Yes, sir" Sirius sighed "The more people who know the secret, the bigger the risk that someone who shouldn't know it will learn it" He looked over at Harry, who nodded, then turned back to Fudge "Maybe we could compromise?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"I am fairly confident that I can protect Harry in our home, and when he is around the neighbourhood" He looked over at the girls "But if we are going to a public place, then we can meet at a pre-arranged location to be escorted by your Aurors"

"Uncle Mike?" Sally asked "Do you think my house would be a good place?"

"If you and your mother don't mind?"

"It will be fine" Sally replied with a smile "And I think we might be able to set up a secure floo connection, so you can get there easily"

"Cool" Harry smiled "That sounds great"

"And the protection details for Miss Perks and Miss Granger?"

"Can we ask our parents?" Hermione asked.

"Of course" Fudge said with a smile "I will make the arrangements just in case" He smiled again, then picked up a piece of paper "I have just one more thing"

"Yes?"

"The Wizengamot wants to give Sirius Black the Dementor's Kiss when he is caught" Fudge said seriously "And I would like you and your godson to attend a press conference to announce that fact, and to say you support the decision"

"Will he get a trial?" Sally asked. When they all looked at her, she continued "I mean - from what Uncle Mike and Harry have said, he is obviously guilty, but it would be better to ensure he gets a fair trial, so the public see that he is punished"

"Okay. If you insist" Fudge smiled.

"Minister, would it be okay if we discussed this?" Sirius asked.

"Of course" He stood up and left. Sirius held up his hand, then cast a detection spell. A moment later, he nodded.

"Okay - it's clear. Do you think we should do this?"

"Yes" Harry replied "He supported us over the dragon, and over Hagrid's imprisonment last year"

"And you are happy that he is using you?"

"Honestly? I don't mind this time" Harry smiled when Sirius looked at him questioningly "Whoever is pretending to be you can't be doing it for a good reason, so if they catch him then we can find out what he wants" There was a pause, then Sirius nodded.

"Okay" He smiled.

"Plus" Harry added with a big smirk "Imagine how much this will bug Dumbledore"

"Harry?"

The four of them turned to see Arthur Weasley walking down the corridor towards them.

"Mr Weasley. How are you?"

"I'm find, thank you" He smiled at the others "I was wondering if you would like to stay with us during the holidays?"

"I'm sorry Mr Weasley, but we were just talking to Minister Fudge about security, and it seems unlikely that I will be able to stay away from home for the near future" Harry replied politely.

"And you can't spend one night away?" Arthur asked "I know Ginny would love to see you"

"Mr Weasley" Sally said with a sigh "Since Sirius Black has decided to show his face again, Harry is more of a target. And if he went to stay at The Burrow, it might make you more of a target too"

"Ah - I understand" Arthur frowned "Molly and Ginny were looking forward to seeing you"

"Well - give them my apologies, but it really wouldn't be safe" Sirius smiled "But maybe, if they catch Black..."

"Okay" Arthur watched them walk away, and sighed again. His wife wouldn't be happy about this, but he had to admit that Harry and his uncle had a point. He looked at his watch, and realised it was time to go home. He really wasn't looking forward to breaking this to his youngest.

"Did you really mean what you said about visiting later, if Black was caught?"

"Do you want to?"

"No!"

"Then don't worry about it"

"Hello love, how was work?" Molly asked as her husband came through the floo.

"It was fine dear, but I ran in to Harry and his uncle"

"Did he say anything about coming to visit?" Ginny asked, coming in to the lounge. Arthur looked down at her, and smiled.

"He said he would have to think about it, love"

"Is it that Perks girl?" Molly asked "I never liked her!"

"No, it's not Sally-Ann" Arthur gazed down at his daughter again "He and his uncle were meeting with Minister Fudge, and - with the return of Sirius Black - they are taking more precautions than usual, and Harry himself said that he didn't want to make The Burrow a target by coming here" He knew he was blurring the truth slightly, but he didn't want to upset his daughter any more than he could avoid.

"That is so sweet of him!" Ginny exclaimed "He is putting our safety above his own happiness!" She clapped her hands, then slipped out of the room. Arthur watched her go, then turned to his wife.

"I talked to Albus today, and he says he will arrange it for this coming year at school"

"That's good"

"I still worry about her" He sighed "You heard what he said at the end of term"

"He is a child - he doesn't know what he wants" Molly said forcefully "Once Ginny is in Gryffindor, and not being possessed by You-Know-Who, then she will be able to convince Harry where his best interests lie" She watched the look on her husband's face "He obviously cares about her - he went down to The Chamber to save her - and he took the time to talk to you at The Ministry"

"I ran in to him" Arthur said "But I suppose until we know something for sure, it isn't worth telling her"

"And who knows - perhaps Sirius Black will be caught within days, and he will be able to come and visit"

"Tonight?"

"Yes"

"Do it quietly - if you get caught then all of our plans might suffer, and I am sure you wouldn't want that"

"Yes"

"Then go"

"So what do you want to do?" Sally asked Harry. She had come over for their birthday, and were waiting for Hermione to arrive.

"Well - I know you wanted to go shopping, and if Uncle Mike agrees, we can. But I think we should do some training"

"You want to start already?" She asked in surprise.

"Well - the last two years have been..."

"A nightmare?"

"Pretty much. So honestly I think we should be ready for whatever next year will bring" He leaned over and kissed her "And with this fake Sirius running around, I can't imagine that this year is going to be filled with puppy-dogs and ice-cream"

"Okay. First - when Minnie FINALLY gets here - we go out to Diagon Ally to get you a birthday present"

"You too"

"Me too" She smiled "And this afternoon, when we get back, we can do a bit of fighting"

"Sounds fun!" Hermione said from behind them.

"MINNIE!!"

"Uncle Mike!"

"Harry, Min, Sally - I have some bad news"

"So - was there any damage?" Dumbledore asked as he looked around. Three hours before he had received a call from Arthur Weasley, telling him that The Burrow had been attacked.

"No" Arthur lead the Headmaster around the outside of the property "I mean - there were a few scorch marks, and Ginny is a little shaken up, but I think that was because they surprised her, not because they wanted to hurt her"

"And you are sure it was Black?"

"Yes. I got a good look at him as he was leaving - he was with someone I didn't recognise"

"Why do you think he was here? What did he want?"

"I don't know" Arthur stopped, then turned to face Dumbledore "The two of them were here when we came back, and they looked like they were searching for someone" Arthur's eyes went wide as something occurred to him.

"Arthur?"

"Albus - about a week ago I was talking to Harry at The Ministry, and I invited him to stay"

"Why was Harry at The Ministry?"

"Talking to The Minister about Black"

"Oh" Dumbledore frowned "Do you think Black came here because he thought Harry might be here?"

"It's possible, but that would mean there might be a spy at The Ministry" Arthur looked around "How long do you think the new wards will take?"

"Well - I think you should get some Aurors out tonight, but Filius and I can come back tomorrow to rework all the wards, and add some

more around the house" Dumbledore smiled "And once that is done, I think the house should be safe enough if you want to invite Harry to stay again"

"Thank you, Headmaster. I will reconsider asking Harry about coming to stay"

"So... for the next week or so, I don't think you should be going to any public places" Sirius had told them about the attack on The Burrow, and the involvement of the fake Sirius Black.

"Okay" Harry smiled "But if we go out to the park in disguise, will that be okay?"

"As long as Lucky can come too" Sirius gave them a big smile as they all sighed "You are going to love spending time with your Uncle Mike!" They stared at him for a moment, but before they could reply, the fireplace burst in to life and Susan stepped through, holding a letter.

"Harry - this arrived for you about five minutes ago" She glanced apologetically at her daughter "It's from Ginny Weasley"

"Oh joy" Sally replied as Harry opened it, and skimmed through the contents "So - what does the wacky Slytherin have to say for herself?" Harry looked up, then started reading aloud.

"Dear Harry. My dad told me that he saw you in The Ministry, and you said that you turned down the invitation to stay at The Burrow because you didn't want to risk Sirius Black attacking us because of you. Well - as you have probably heard, we were attacked last night. No one was hurt, and we don't think he stole anything. But because of the attack, Professor Dumbledore and Professor Flitwick spent a whole day upgrading and replacing the wards, and The Burrow is now one of the best protected homes in the country" He paused, not wanting to read what was coming next "So - now that we live in a fortress, I would like to re-invite you to stay for a week before we return to school. Love always, Ginny"

There was a moment of silence.

"Do you want to go?" Sally asked. Harry shook his head "Then tell her the truth"

"Pardon?"

"Tell her that, since Black has reappeared, and is attacking places, that it's really not a good idea for you to be away from home"

"You don't think that will upset and annoy her?"

"Yes, but if you tell her a story, and she finds out, then she will be even more annoyed" Susan smiled "But, to be honest, she isn't going to like it either way"

"You didn't find him?"

"We were disturbed sir - the girl came back"

"Very well. You will have to wait until they return to school" There was a pause "And - by the way..."

"Yes master?"

"CRUCIO!!"

Ginny threw the letter from Harry across the room, then pulled out her wand.

"INCENDIO!!"

The letter burst into flames, and, as she sat and watched it burn, she decided that that would be the last time Harry Potter would dare say "no" to Ginny Weasley.

Chapter 3

Two weeks later, everyone gathered at The White House. Sirius wanted to talk to all of them about the coming year, and about something he wanted to teach the children.

"Last year, and come to think of it, the year before, Harry, Minnie and Sally got in to situations where they needed our help, but could not get in touch with us. Now - I have a solution to this, but there are two problems with it, and they are big enough to warrant asking your permission"

"You don't want the children to decide?" Claire asked in surprise.

"Well - it will be up to then. But I think that once I explain the problems, you will understand why I wanted your permission as well"

"So - what is it?" Sally asked.

"Astral Projection" He smiled when Hermione squeed "You have heard of it then?"

"I read about it - it sounds fascinating!"

"Why am I not surprised?" He smiled fondly at her, then turned back to the group "Astral Projection is the ability to project yourself in to the Astral Plane. Depending how you cast the spell, the effects can range from a ghostly figure to a fully corporeal figure with the ability to use magic and weapons of various sorts. It is also possible to change the appearance of the image - you can appear to be someone else, or anything else, and to actually use AP to transport yourself from one place to another"

"Like apparition?" Susan asked.

"Kind of. It's harder to learn, but a lot safer, and a lot, lot harder to ward against" He looked down at the three students "Are you interested?" They all nodded, Hermione's head bobbing up and down so fast it almost blurred "Good. Because now I have to tell you the downside" He paused, took a deep breath and continued "The biggest problem is that the higher end of the skills - use of magic, ethereal transfer and so on - takes a lot of magic to power it. Far more than you have at the moment, even if you could combine your

cores. I am not an expert, but I would say we should at least wait until you are done with puberty before moving in to the advanced stuff"

"Why puberty?" Claire asked.

"Along with growth spurts and the other affects" Hermione told her mother "Magical children also get a boost in their magic" She turned back to Sirius "So - what is the other problem?"

"The spell requires you to separate your mind from your body" He replied carefully "And there have been instances where a witch or wizard has got the spell badly wrong and literally lost their mind" He saw a look of panic appear on everyone's faces "These events are very, very rare, but I thought you should know all the potential dangers. So - I want you three to promise us four that you will only practice what you have been taught - no skipping ahead - and that you will never, ever do this alone while you are learning a new skill"

"We promise" The three children said together.

"Good" Sirius looked over at the other adults "If you don't want me to teach the girls, I won't. And Harry won't either" His godson nodded in agreement.

"As long as they keep their promises" Arnold said "I don't see any reason not to" He turned to his daughter "But if you break your word, even once, I will take you out of school and send you to St Drusilla's"

"I understand Dad" She hugged him "And I swear you won't regret this"

"Then we will call that settled" Sirius looked around the group "Now - I just want a word with your parents, so go play!"

"Yes Uncle Mike!"

"So what did you want to say to us that you didn't think the kids should hear?" Susan asked as the four sat down around the dining table.

"Well - it mostly just involves you, but I asked Claire and Arnold to be here as witnesses" Sirius replied. He looked down at the papers on the table "There is someone running around, and he is pretending to be me. And although I don't know what he is doing it for, I can't imagine it is anything good" He paused for breath "Meanwhile, I am a wanted criminal, masquerading as an American Uncle to Harry. If I am caught as me, I will be sent to Azkaban faster than you can blink, and that assumes I won't be kissed on sight"

"What about Pettigrew?" Claire asked.

"I was getting to that. The third and final part of the problem is the great and glorious Albus Dumbledore. He is not only the Headmaster of Hogwarts, which gives him some not inconsiderable power, but he is the most senior magical law officer in the country, and one of the most powerful wizards in the world" He shook his head "And, for reasons I am not entirely clear on, he is totally and utterly obsessed with Harry. I am sure that if I am ever found, Albus will ensure that I don't get a fair trial, and that I am forced to give up all claim on my godson"

"And he will be sent to Lily's sister" Arnold said.

"Either that, or will become a ward of the school" He looked over at Susan "This is why I wanted to speak to you" He passed her a documents "I would like to give you joint guardianship of Harry" She gasped in surprise "This way, if something Happens to me, whether by the hand of Fake Me or Dumbledore, then Harry's future will be with someone who loves him, and more importantly someone who loves him for who he is, not what he is"

"And Dumbledore won't be able to challenge this?"

"If we can take care of it tonight, then I can file it, in secret, with The Minister as the third witness, Dumbledore would only be able to challenge it if he could prove you were coerced in to this, or that you were unfit to be Harry's guardian, and he won't be able to do either of those" He smiled softly "I realise I have sprung this on you, and if you want time to think, or if you want to say no, I won't hold it against you. I just wanted to ensure Harry will be looked after, and loved"

Susan read through the custody agreement, then looked back up at Sirius.

"Will this be valid under the name Michael Whiteheart"

"Yes" He smiled "In the early years, I ensured that Mr Whiteheart was a legally real person in this country, and back in the USA"

"And why don't you want Harry to know?"

"I don't want him to think I am giving up, or that I want rid of him"

"Can non-magical people be witnesses?" Arnold asked "Don't you need magical signatories?"

"No - but, if you are wondering, The Wizengamot would never, ever permit the heir of one of the seven families to be a ward of muggles" Susan sighed "Even muggles who already have a magical daughter"

"Isn't the magical world great?" Sirius said with a smirk.

"I will sign this, Michael, on one condition"

"Yes?"

"Would you be willing to sign a similar agreement for Sally?"

"Are you sure?" Sirius replied "I mean - I am doing this because I don't trust Dumbledore to do the right thing"

"And he doesn't like Harry and Sally's relationship" Susan frowned "If he ended up with custody of my daughter, she would be out of Hogwarts, and out of his life forever. Do you really want that?"

"No" Sirius shook his head "Okay - I will take joint guardianship of Sally, if you will of Harry" He turned to the Grangers "Do you..."

"I think we will be okay for the moment" Claire said "We have a lot of relatives who would be willing to take her in. But thank you for asking"

A few moments later, the documents were signed.

"Okay - lets go see what they have managed to get up to!"

The rest of the holidays passed quickly. The three kids all decided to do the same classes, except while Hermione chose Arithmancy, Sally and Harry chose to do Muggle Studies.

"I am pretty sure the maths would be beyond me" Sally said by way of explanation, and Harry nodded his agreement.

By the time it came to their annual trip to Diagon Alley, all three of them had learned enough of Astral Projection to project a ghostly figure across the room. Sally had the most solid looking of the three, but they were all happy with their progress.

"If you can keep this up, then you should be able to practice in school" Sirius beamed at them "But only two of you at once - the third will have to watch, and be ready to summon one of us if necessary"

On the morning of the trip to Diagon Alley, Hermione and her parents went to The White House, and all five of them flooded to Sally and Susan's, where they were met by a detail of twelve Aurors.

"TWELVE?" Harry gasped in surprise.

"My name is Auror Beth Finch" A tall, blonde lady said "And the reason the team is so large is two fold" She turned to the team, and they split in to two groups "The first is because the six on the left are going to go ahead to The Leaky Cauldron, and we will go after them" She turned to Hermione with a slight smile "The other reasons is in case the seven of you want to split up - say to buy birthday presents"

"Ah" Sally smiled as Hermione blushed "That makes sense" She smiled at Harry, then snapped her fingers and turned back to the lead Auror "I have a question about underage magic"

"Yes, Miss Perks?"

"Are we allowed to defend ourselves?" She pulled out her wand "I mean - if we are attacked, and - for whatever reason - you and the others can't help, are we permitted to defend ourselves?"

"Technically? No" Finch replied "But if things get that bad, I think the underage restrictions would be the least of your worries" She smiled, then clapped her hands "But Black would have to be mad to attack Diagon Alley on Back To School day, so I wouldn't worry about it"

"Is that Harry?"

Ginny's head shot round at her brother's voice, and a smile came to her lips.

"Maybe we should go and say hello?" Ron suggested "Or do you think the armed guard might be a problem?" He looked at the Aurors stationed around the small group.

"They are there to protect him from Black" Arthur said "And, by extension, Miss Perks and Miss Granger, since Black might use them to get to him" He looked over at Ginny, who was frowning "Gin?"

"He really doesn't care about me, does he?" She sighed "Otherwise there would be Aurors guarding me as well"

"So you're upset because your life isn't in danger from a homicidal lunatic?" George asked, then shrunk back when both Ginny and his father turned to glare at him "Sorry"

"Go over and say hi, sweetie" Arthur suggested "I am sure he will be happy to see you"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes"

"Mr Potter - do you know the young lady coming up the street?" Auror Reed asked. Harry turned, then sighed as he saw Ginny Weasley coming towards them "Mr Potter?"

"She's the daughter of Arthur Weasley, and she isn't dangerous" He smirked when he heard Sally snort in disbelief "Well - she doesn't want to kill me, anyway"

"You sure?" Sally asked quietly "Because I think that if you don't give in and date her..."

"Ginny!" Harry said, cutting across Sally's comment.

"Harry!" The young girl smiled back "So - how are you? Have you had a nice summer? Do you know what subjects you are taking? Have you heard any more about Sirius Black?"

"Hello Ginny - I am fine, thank you for asking. Our summer has been good, and we are all taking the same courses, except Hermione who is taking Arithmency, while Sal and I are doing Muggle Studies, and no - I haven't heard any more about Black" He smiled "How are you?"

"Well - we have managed to get The Burrow back to normal, and it is now very well protected. I am sorry you couldn't come and visit, but I understand given the circumstances, and I am sure you will find some way to make it up to me at school"

"I can't wait" Sally whispered, causing Harry to slap her wrist

"So where's Hermione?"

"We were just going to Flourish and Blots to pick up her birthday present, so she, and her parents, are waiting at Fortescues" Sally replied, then took a deep breath "Would you like to join us later?"

"Thank you, but I have to be going. Percy has been named Head Boy, and mum promised him a reward" She smiled, then turned and walked away.

"Oh wonderful" Harry smiled "The wacky Slytherin's older brother is now Head Boy. This bodes well"

"Come on - we have to get to the bookshop" Sally pulled hi hand, and they walked off down the street.

From round the corner, Ginny watched them go, then smiled to herself.

"That went well"

"You know when you think the day can't get any worse, it generally does?" Hermione sighed.

"Yes?" Sally looked up, then followed her friend's gaze, shook her head and sighed "Do you think if we tell the Aurors that he is Black in disguise, they will stun him so we can run away?" Hermione smirked at the idea, then shook her head.

"I think it's possible it would come back to haunt us later in the year"

"Miss Perks, Miss Granger" Dumbledore looked down at them "How are you two today?"

"We are both fine, thank you sir" Hermione replied "Have you had a nice holiday?"

"Yes, thank you" He looked around "Is Mr Potter not with you?"

"He is buying an anniversary present for Sally" Hermione replied "They have been together for over a year now. Isn't that nice?"

"It's adorable" Dumbledore smiled down at Sally "May I ask how your mother feels about the extra danger you face from being involved with Harry?"

Sally stared at him for a moment, then made a show of looking at the six Aurors guarding them, then turned back to the Headmaster "I think she is okay with it, sir, since I am now one of the best protected students in the Alley"

"And given the fact they have nearly been killed twice under your protection, Headmaster, I am not sure that you have any business talking about my daughter, or my nephew's or niece's safety" Dumbledore turned to see Susan, Sirius and Harry, along with four Aurors, stood behind him.

"Mrs Perks, Mr Whiteheart" He nodded "Harry - are you sure it is safe for you to be seen in public?"

"There are twelve Aurors, my Uncle, my honorary Aunts and Uncle, several dozen shopkeepers and" Harry gestured to the two girls "We each have a portkey to The Ministry if we need it" He smiled "As Aunt Susan said, I am far safer now than I have been in the past two years at school"

"I am sorry you feel that way" Dumbledore smiled "But - I was wondering if I might have a word with you, about your safety at Hogwarts while Black is on the loose"

Harry looked at Sirius, who shrugged.

"Very well, but we are waiting for Hermione's parents to come back - they are buying a birthday present"

"Actually - we are here" Claire and Arnold, and the remaining two Aurors, walked up to them from the left "So - what are we talking about?"

"The Headmaster was about to tell us that, despite the fact Voldemort has been in school for the past two years, and nearly killed our children twice, this year he will be able to protect them better, despite the fact there is a murderous traitor on the loose who knows the halls of Hogwarts like the back of his hand" Everyone stared at Susan as she finished speaking "What?"

"Professor Dumbledore?" Arnold looked at him for clarification.

"Mrs Perks is essentially correct about the topic" He replied with a smile "Although I might have phrased it a little differently" He turned back to Harry "I presume that, since your guardian's house is under Fidelius, you are unwilling to let me come there?"

"I don't think my Uncle would like it, sir" Harry said, deliberately emphasising his relationship to Sirius. Then he leaned over to Sally, and whispered in her ear. She nodded, then stood up and walked over to her mother and Sirius. After a hurried, whispered conversation, she turned back and nodded to her boyfriend "Sally and Aunt Sue have offered their house, but only on two conditions"

"And they are?"

"At least Sally and Hermione, but preferably all seven of us, must be present, since it affects the two of them as well"

"There might be sensitive..."

"Sir - I am going to tell them everything, even if they aren't in the room when we talk"

"Very well then"

"The second condition is that Auror Finch will be present as well. Oh - and you will agreed to be checked for portkeys before entering the room"

"You think I would kidnap you?" Dumbledore asked in surprise.

"You lied..." Sally looked around "I will explain my reasoning in private, sir"

"And besides" Auror Finch glanced sideways at Sally "For all we know, you could be Sirius Black in disguise" Sally went bright red, and Hermione burst out laughing.

"I have been willing to put up with your recklessness over the past two years, but now there is some real danger, I must insist that you go and live with your mother's sister" Dumbledore stated "Your mother gave her life so that you would be safe, and yet you disregard the sacrifice she made by living in a dangerous and exposed environment"

"Headmaster, unless my advisers are wrong about the law, you can insist on nothing, and you have no say in where I live" Harry leaned back in his chair, keeping his voice deliberately calm "And I am well aware of how my mother died, and the effect that he sacrifice produced. Perhaps you remember what happened to my first DaDa teacher?" Without giving Dumbledore a chance to reply, he continued "My Uncle has kept me safe since the day he found me, and our house - the dangerous and exposed environment you are so keen to remove me from - is so well protected that even you can't find it"

"And I think that, after we killed a basilisk, we are capable of looking after ourselves" Hermione added.

"So - did you want to talk about school?" Harry asked "Or are we done?"

"Have your guardians signed your Hogsmeade forms?"

"Yes sir"

"A pity, but I have ceased to be shocked by the level of disregard your Uncle shows for your welfare" This time, he did not wait for Harry to reply "I won't try to talk you round about the forms - I am well aware of how little you value my opinion - but I must insist that if you do go down to the village, you do so as a group, and do not split up" He glanced at Harry and Sally "I know you two might want to spend some time alone, but Miss Granger can not be allowed to walk round unaccompanied"

"That won't be a problem sir" Sally replied "Is there anything else?"

"I would like you to obey a general curfew - in that you will stay within the castle when it is dark, unless you are accompanied by a member of staff"

"Of course sir" Hermione nodded "We won't be out of the castle at night"

"Then there is only one other thing" He looked at them with a serious expression "I would urge you to consider guards from The Order to protect you. They can be very discrete, and with all due respect to Ms Finch, and to you three basilisk slayers, they have a wide range of methods for dealing with dark wizards"

"They are members of an illegal, vigilante group" Finch commented.

"And weren't Black and Pettigrew members?" Arnold asked.

"What is your point?" The Headmaster replied.

"I trust Minister Fudge to protect me and mine, and so I trust the Aurors he assigns to the task" Harry smiled at Finch "No offense meant"

"None taken"

"But, Professor, ever since I met you, you have been trying to split me up from my family, my friends and my girlfriend, and you have been trying to interfere in my life since my parents died" He paused "You had no right to try to place me at the Dursleys - you were not the executor of my parents will, nor were you my guardian. And on top of all that, you have lied to us on a number of occasions, so you can imagine why I am unwilling to trust you, or to trust anyone you

might assign to guard us" He fell silent, staring at the Headmaster, waiting for a reply.

"I am sorry you feel that way, Harry, and I can only say I have done what is best"

"But it is none of your business, sir. I have a guardian, and you are merely the Headmaster of the school that I am currently attending" Harry stood up "Is that all, sir? Because Hermione and I should be going, and Sally needs to pack"

"Yes. That is all" Dumbledore stood as well "I will see you at the feast and the sorting" He gave Harry one last look, then turned and walked out of the house. As he walked down the path, he thought to himself "Damn that child. He will bow to my wishes, whatever the cost"

Chapter 4

Two days later, they were dropped off at Platform 9 3/4.

"So - we will see you at Christmas?" Susan asked, kissing each of them goodbye.

"Or maybe later tonight" Harry smiled.

"Only if you can be sure no one will see" Sirius smiled back.

"We will be sure" Hermione nodded. Then she looked up at the clock "We should go"

"There is only one cabin free - but..." Harry peered inside "There is someone in there" They looked in, and saw a grown-up asleep in the far corner "It's the only cabin. If we are quiet, we can probably avoid waking him"

"You don't have to be quiet" A voice came from the figure in the corner "I am awake"

"Sorry, sir" Sally said, smiling at the stranger "We were trying to be quiet"

"Don't worry, Miss Perks" The man sat up "I was already awake, and the reason I didn't let on was so that you wouldn't be too scared to come in" He smiled again "My name is..."

"Professor R.J. Lupin" Hermione pointed up to the briefcase on the luggage rack "How did you know Sally's name?"

"Professor Dumbledore was kind enough to tell me about some of my students" He looked over at Sally "But I would know Daniel's daughter anywhere"

"You knew my dad?" Sally sat down with a bump.

"He went to school with them" Harry sat down next to her "And with James, Lily, Peter and Black" He saw Lupin studying him "I know - I have my mother's eyes"

"You know about... everyone?" Lupin asked in surprise.

"My guardian, Michael Whiteheart, was a very good friend of my dad's. He told me a lot of stories about The Marauders, and my parents" He saw the look of worry on the professor's face, and made a quick decision "Could you cast a silencing spell, sir?" Lupin stared at him curiously, then complied.

"It's done"

"We know you are a werewolf" Harry said quickly "But we also know you are not a dangerous creature, just someone who was cursed"

"We promise we won't tell anyone" Hermione said "And that we will help to keep your secret as best we can"

"Why?" He looked at them "Most wizards think werewolves are dangerous monsters that should be put down like... like dogs" He shook his head "So - why?"

"Because James, Lily, Daniel and Susan wouldn't have treated you like that" Sally said seriously "So we won't either"

There was a long moment of silence.

"So" Harry said, in an attempt to break the mood "Can you tell us about our parents? What they were like in school and... so on?"

An hour and half later, Lupin stood up.

"Sorry to interrupt this, but I have to go and speak to the driver" He said with a fond smile "But I will be back later"

"Okay" Harry watched him go, then turned back "Seems Uncle Mike was right - he is nice"

"And - as defence teachers go - he doesn't seem to be a Dark Lord or a narcissist, which makes him the best yet" Hermione smirked, then they turned as the door to the compartment slid open.

"So Potter, Perks and..." Malfoy stared at Hermione for a moment "Who cares" He turned back to Harry "I hear Sirius Black has returned" He gave Harry a sneer "I am surprised you are here, Potter"

"Where else would I be?" Harry asked.

"If I were you, I would be out looking for him - getting some revenge for what he did"

"Oh!" Harry smiled "You think I should skip school, and hunt down a wizard nearly three times my age, who was allied with a powerful, dark wizard that killed hundreds, rather than letting the people who's job it is to catch dark wizards do it?" He laughed, then continued "the person who betrayed my parents will get what is coming to him, even if it is not by my hand. And, as much as you might want me to die, I am not going to give you the pleasure"

"Scared?"

"Pretty much" Harry nodded "Any more questions, or can we get back to something that isn't obviously stupid?"

Malfoy stared at him, then turned and stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

"Well - that was fun" Sally said with a laugh.

"POTTER!!!" The door to the compartment flew open as Ron stormed in.

"You rang?"

"Malfoy is telling everyone that you admitted to being a coward! A GRYFFINDOR coward!!"

"And?" Harry sounded remarkably unconcerned.

"AND???" Ron practically screamed in his face "The Slytherins will have a field day with this!"

"Then perhaps you want to tell everyone that we three faced Voldemort in our first year, and we won" Sally said firmly.

"And that three months ago we faced down a basilisk to save your sister" Hermione added.

"And that we can say Voldemort without hiding under the bed" Harry frowned "How many of your precious Gryffindors can do that? And anyway - how many are going to listen to Malfoy in the first place?"

"Did you tell him you were a coward?" Ginny asked softly as she entered the cabin behind her brother.

"He said I should leave school, hunt down Sirius Black and deal with him myself. I said that I had better things to do than die horribly. He asked me if I was scared, and I said yes" Harry looked across at Ron "Black is a grown wizard who worked for Voldemort. Is it any surprise the idea of facing him scares me?"

"So you told Malfoy that?" Ron yelled again.

"He asked, and I told him the truth" Harry replied "Are we done, or do you have any more stupid questions?"

"You have to prove you are not a coward!!"

"If you think I am going to fight Black to get Malfoy's, your's or anyone else's respect, then at least we know why you weren't put in Ravenclaw"

"And, after the past two years, do you really think we give a damn what anyone else thinks about us?" Sally asked "The Hufflepuffs despise us"

"So do most of the Gryffindors" Hermione continued.

"And The Slytherins have always loathed us" Harry finished, then turned to the other two with a questioning look "How come we haven't annoyed the Ravenclaws yet?"

"Just lucky I guess" Sally smirked "But don't worry - I am sure we will manage it by the end of the year" She turned back to Ron "We don't care about Malfoy. And we don't care all that much about you. So - either stop talking about this, or get out" Ron stared at her for a moment, then turned and stormed away down the corridor. His sister watched him go, then turned back to face them.

"Ginny?" Hermione looked at the young girl "Are you staying?"

"If you don't mind?" She looked over at Harry "I know how I behaved last year, and I admit that I can only blame part of it on the diary"

She took a deep breath "I would like to start again - as friends" She looked hopefully at him. Harry stared back for a few moments, then held out his hand.

"Harry Potter"

"Ginny Weasley"

"Nice to meet you" He smiled "So - tell us all about yourself"

"Professor..."

"Yes?" Lupin looked up, then followed the driver's hand to where she was pointing "Oh dear"

As the train slowed down, Hermione stood up and peered out of the window.

"We can't be there already, can we?" Sally asked.

"No - we are in the middle of a river" Hermione replied.

"So why have we stopped?" Harry asked.

"And why is it so cold?" Ginny added.

The others looked around, and noticed that ice was forming on the windows. Then they all turned as Harry sat down with a bump.

"Harry?" Sally sat down next to him, and took his hand "Are you okay?"

"Felt a little... od..." He trailed off, and they all looked up as the lights went out. A moment later the corridor was plunged into darkness as well. Then, against the starlight outside, they saw a dark figure drift down the passage towards them. It stopped outside their compartment, and pulled the doors open.

"What the..." Hermione started, then shivered and took a step back. She looked around, and realised everyone else had done the same.

Then she noticed Harry was staring at the figure with a look of utter horror "HARRY!!"

"Someone's screaming" He whispered "We have to save her" He didn't notice Sally and Hermione hug him from each side, but a moment later, he started to come round from his trance, and then he smiled at his friends.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!"

A voice came from outside the compartment, and the dark figure backed out of the door, and then glided away. A moment later, Professor Lupin came in, a look of concern on his face.

"Is everyone all right?" He put his hand in to his robes, and pulled out a huge block of chocolate. He broke it in to pieces, and handed one to each of the students.

"What... what was that?" Ginny asked between mouthfuls.

"A dementor" Lupin said, his voice filled with loathing and disgust "They guard the Prison of Azkaban, and are, by far and away, the most foul and horrible creatures on this earth"

"Is everyone okay?" Harry looked around "I heard a woman screaming..."

"No one was screaming, sweetie" Sally leaned her head on his shoulder "Are you sure you weren't imagining it?"

"Maybe..." He looked confused "It started when that... thing came in"

"A memory" Lupin handed him another, larger, piece of chocolate "Despite the popular perception, dementors feed on your worst memories - they bring them to the surface, and force you to relive them" He put his hand on Harry's shoulder "I think you might have heard your mother, on the night she died"

Utter silence greeted this statement, then everyone jumped in surprise when the lights came back on, and the train started moving again. Lupin looked around, then put his wand back inside his robes.

"If you will excuse me, I should go and see to the rest of the train" He smiled, turned and left. Harry watched him go, then looked back at the rest of the group.

"I like him"

The rest of the journey passed quietly, and, after their encounter with the dementor, the three third years allowed Ginny to travel up to the castle with them.

They took their seats at the Gryffindor table, but then stared at Ginny as she sat down with them.

"Ginny?"

"Trust me"

As the rest of the students filed in, Ginny got a lot more glances, but - as Hermione noticed - none from her brothers.

When everyone was seated, and the first years were lined up against the back wall, Professor Dumbledore stood up.

"If you will permit me, I must break with tradition, as there is a matter that I must discuss before the Sorting, and the feast. As you will have noticed, this year the school will be playing host to the dementors of Azkaban, until he is caught, or declared to be no longer a threat" He sighed.

"They will be stationed at every entrance to the school, so I caution you all not to try to leave the grounds without an escort. Dementors are not known for their sense of humour, nor for mercy, compassion or empathy. I implore you all to be on your best behaviour, and not to try to trick or deceive them in any manner" He looked around, ensuring that everyone understood.

"The rest of the announcements can wait until after the Sorting, so Professor McGonagall - if you will..." He sat back down, and watched as McGonagall walked to the front of the hall, and waited as Professor Flitwick placed the Sorting Hat on the three legged stool.

It is my job the students to sort
A task I do at the speed of thought
But there are those who would my task task suborn
And who'd be my voice, though I am not worn

But all of you who are now new
Will now see what I make of you
Ravenclaw Smart, Slytherin
Gryffindor Bold, Hufflepuff
These are the Hogwarts Houses
And where I pick, you'll be ever more

Three friends once were split by war
But now they will unite once more
To Hogwarts will these friends return
With secrets for the rest to learn
And while demons gather all around
A traitor will at last be found
His actions buries in the past
Will be revealed to all, at last
And a choice five lions will have to make,
To Cross The Bridge, or let evil wake.

For a moment there was silence, then the various house tables began to chatter about the very dismissive way the Hat had described them. Harry leaned over and whispered in Sally's ear, causing her to snort in amusement.

"So - what do you think she meant by someone speaking for her?" Hermione asked, but before either of them could respond, Professor McGonagall lifted up her list.

"Before I call the first years forward, there is one student who has been resorted over the summer, after a decision by the staff to allow her request" She paused "Miss Ginny Weasley will now be a member of Gryffindor House"

Harry and Sally looked at Hermione, and they all smirked. But they made a token show of joining in the applause for the newest member of their house. They also tried very hard to keep from smiling when it became apparent that the Slytherins were also applauding the decision.

When the applause died down, Professor McGonagall continued.

"SOPHIE ANDERSON"

"So - is it me, or did Vanessa seem a tad pissed off?" Sally asked as she passed Harry a plate of vegetables.

"Do you think she was telling the truth?" He glanced over at Ginny
"That Dumbledore moved her, not Vanessa?"

"Yes" Sally piled some potatoes on her plate, then reached for the gravy "He would justify it as doing it for her own good, and because the Hat made a mistake last year"

"Do you think he would have moved me?" Harry asked.

"Do you think he wouldn't?" Hermione responded "The child of Lily and James Potter in the green and silver?"

"Much better that you are one of the Three Lions" Sally smirked "But what about the other half of the song?"

"I have no idea, but since the last two years were all about us, I think it is a safe bet that we will find out soon enough" Harry smiled "Isn't school fun?"

Before either of them could reply, the hall fell silent as Dumbledore stood up.

"I just have a few more announcements" He smiled "The Forbidden Forrest is still off limits to all, even more so because of the dementors within, and Mr Filch has updated the list of banned objects" He looked down at the parchment.

"Third years and above may visit Hogsmeade during various weekends, providing they have a signed permission form from their parents or guardians. But please take note - if the visits become too much of a security problem, they may be re-arranged or suspended" He looked around.

"And last, but by no means least, I Have the pleasure of introducing two new members of staff. Taking over Care Of Magical Creatures, we have Professor Rubeus Hagrid" He paused as there were a few scattered claps, notably from the far end of the Gryffindor table "And for Defence Against The Dark Arts, Professor Remus Lupin" He looked over in surprise as Harry, Sally and Hermione jumped to their feet and started applauding loudly. A moment later, Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood joined in, and the rest of the Ravenclaws and

Gryffindors soon followed suit. The Headmaster let them continue for a minute or so, then held up his hand for silence "And with that, I bid you have a nice evening" He sat down, still gazing down at the far end of the Gryffindor table, where the three students who seemed to know the new defence teacher very well, were sat.

"So - who wants to go first?" Sally looked around as they walked up to the common room "See if the wards can pick it up?"

"Not me" Hermione shook her head. They both stared at her, clearly expecting more "My parents tend to celebrate having the house to themselves, and I really don't need to see that again" She turned a light pink colour "Long story"

"I'll give it a try" Harry said softly "Uncle Mike doesn't have a lot of guests, and he can catch us up on any news"

"Ask him about Lupin as well - see if we can trust him" Hermione added.

"Okay" They reached the portrait hole, and they climbed through it. Harry looked around, then said "I'll just be upstairs, unpacking" The two girls nodded, and he slipped off upstairs. A moment later, Sally followed.

Sirius looked up in surprise when someone walked in to the study.

"Harry?"

"Uncle Mike?"

"Harry?"

"Uncle Mike?"

"Harry?"

"Are we going to do this all night?"

"Sorry. So - it worked?"

"Yeah" Harry's ghostly figure replied.

"And you didn't trigger the wards?" Harry turned on the spot as his uncle walked around his projected image.

"I don't think so" Harry smirked as Sirius continued to stare at him
"Hermione is downstairs, and will warn us if anyone comes in" He paused "Will you stop staring?"

"Sorry" Sirius blinked, then sat down again "So - did you just drop by to show off your new skill, or was there another reason?"

"We met Remus, and talked about my parents. He seems nice enough. He does think that Sirius is the scum of the earth, though"

"Doesn't surprise me" Sirius shook his head.

"Do you think we can trust him?"

"Maybe, but he is very loyal to Dumbledore, so be wary"

"Okay - we will" Harry paused "Ginny has been put into Gryffindor. Dumbledore says Vanessa did it, but she disagrees"

"Sounds fun"

"You have no idea" He looked around, then tried to snap his fingers, before he realised he wasn't corporeal "We were attacked by a dementor" Sirius leaped to his feet again.

"WHAT?"

"They searched the train" He closed his eyes "I heard my mother screaming, then Professor Lupin cast... a spell, and the dementor fled"

"But you are all right? And the others?"

"Yeah - we are all fine" Harry suddenly looked hopeful "Do you think Remus would teach us the spell?"

"The Patronus Charm"

"The Patronus Charm, if we asked?"

"Probably - if you ask him the right way"

"Okay" Harry looked around "I should go"

"Last thing - you need to keep up the DC training, but somewhere secret"

"I have an idea where" He smiled "See you later"

A moment later, he vanished, leaving Sirius staring at empty space.

Chapter 5

The next morning at breakfast, Professor McGonagall distributed the Gryffindor timetables, and took the Hogsmeade permission slips of those who had them.

"The Headmaster asked me to ask you to reconsider this, Mr Potter"
She held his form up.

"He will have to ban me" Harry said firmly "And he will need a valid reason to do so, if he doesn't want me to argue"

"Very well" She took the form and gave him his timetable. He looked over it, then smiled.

"Defence first" Sally said "And... and no classes with the Slytherins?" Harry read through the rest of his timetable.

"Wow" He looked at her "But more with the Hufflepuffs. You gonna be okay?"

"I'll be fine" She gave him a quick kiss, then stood up "We should get going. Don't want to be late"

"Welcome to Defence Against The Dark Arts. My name, for those who don't remember, is Professor Remus Lupin" He looked around "This year, we are mostly going to focus on Dark Creatures. These are monsters that are dangerous to human beings, even though they might not necessarily be evil"

There was an alarming rattle from the wardrobe behind them.

"If you will all put your books away, you will only need your wands. And can you all stand up, and come to the front of the room"

Everyone followed his directions, and with a quick wave of his wand, he moved the desks to the side of the room.

"Who can tell me what a boggart is?" Sally and Hermione raised their hands "Mis Granger?"

"A boggart is a shape-shifter, sir"

"Anything else? Miss Perks?"

"It takes the shape of what scares you the most, and tries to scare you to death, sir" Sally shivered a little at the thought.

"Very good. Five points each" He looked around "Now - can anyone tell me why we have an advantage over the boggart?" There was a moment's silence, then Hannah Abbot raised her hand "Yes, Miss Abbot?"

"There are so many of us"

"Correct! Five points!" He beamed at the class "I once saw a boggart try to scare two people at once, and tried to change in to a tri-ops and a caloth at the same time"

"A troth?" Harry whispered to Sally.

"What a sad plight" She replied.

"But" Lupin continued "If you face a boggart on your own, you will need the Riddikulus charm" He held up his wand "The incantation, as I said, is Riddikulus, and when you say it, you jab your wand towards the boggart" He pointed his wand down "So - I want you all to repeat after me. One, two, three... Mr Weasley - could you point your wand down please? The charm does work on humans, but I am not sure Miss Patil would appreciate the results" Ron smiled sheepishly, and pointed his wand down "After three... One, Two, Three"

"RIDDIKULUS" The class chanted.

"Good" Lupin looked around "Miss Perks - would you like to try?" Sally stepped forward "Now - what scares you the most?" He looked down at her, then his eyes widened as she shook her head.

"Perhaps you should try someone else sir?"

"Why?" She stared at him, then stood up on her tip-toes and whispered something in her his ear "Ah - I understand. But I would still like you to try, if you are willing?" She paused, then nodded "Okay - what would make it less scary?" She thought for a moment, then smiled "Are you ready?"

"Yes sir"

"Very well" He walked over to the wardrobe, and flung the door open.

Most of the class took a step back, as a black-cloaked figure with a blank, white mask slinked out of the dark. It walked towards Sally, who was staring at it in utter horror. As it raised its wand, she seemed to remember what she was doing.

"RIDDIKULUS!!"

There was a flash of light, and when it cleared, the Death Eater was robed in a bright pink robe, with fairy wings, and a very shiny fairy-princess wand.

The class erupted in laughter, and Lupin nodded encouragingly.

"Next - Mr Weasley!"

One after another, the students stepped forward, faced their fears and turned them in to something less disturbing.

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione stepped forward, and the boggart shifted in to a large, cloaked figure, surrounded by mist. Everyone shivered as the dementor-boggart glided through the room.

For a moment, she stared at it, eyes wide with fear, then she raised her wand.

"RIDDIKULUS!!"

A moment later, a speech bubble appeared over the boggart-dementor, and the words "I never wanted to do this for a living..." came in to view. For a moment, Lupin simply stared at the words as they appeared, then he burst out laughing. He was soon joined by most of the muggle-born students, as well as Susan and Harry, while the rest of the class stared at them, wondering what was so funny.

Seeing Hermione back away, Harry took a step forward, then walked towards the boggart.

Lupin noticed what he was doing, but before he could call out to stop him, Harry came in range of the shapeshifting creature. The now-singing dementor-boggart turned and looked at him.

There was a loud CRACK, then the entire class fell silent, staring at the figure in the middle of the room.

"I have been thinking" Harry said, as they walked to their next class
"Uncle Mike said we needed to find a place to do DC stuff in secret"

"Yes"

"What about Myrtle's bathroom? No one goes in there, so it would be perfect" They stared at him "What?"

"Do you want to talk about what we just saw? About the form of your boggart?"

"What do you want me to say?" He smiled grimly "He scares me far more than anything else, because of who he is, what he does and the power he has to ruin my life" He shook his head "At least Voldemort is honest about wanting to kill me. It is kind of refreshing, really" There was a moment of silence, then Sally shrugged.

"What do you think he will make of it?" She asked "He will find out eventually"

"I would be surprised if he doesn't already know" Hermione said from his other side "From what you have said, it is highly likely Lupin made a report as soon as the lesson ended"

"I don't really care" Harry said "He already knows that I distrust him, and that I am far more likely to listen to Uncle Mike or Aunt Susan, than his group" He looked around "So - should we visit Myrtle after lunch?"

Professor Lupin?"

"I thought I would let you know about something that happened in class"

"Harry?"

"Yes" Lupin sighed "And it's not good"

"HARRY!!" The ghost of Myrtle Harker floated down from the ceiling in her bathroom "And Sally! Minnie!" She bounced around for a moment "How was summer? Why have you come back? Did you miss me?"

"Hello Myrtle" Sally smiled "We had a nice and productive summer, and yes - we missed you. We also came to ask a favour"

"What favour?"

"We would like to use your bathroom to continue training, like we did last year" Hermione said "And the training we did over the holiday"

"Why do you want to use my bathroom?" She asked curiously.

"We need somewhere we can do it in private" Harry looked around "And it is a big enough room to use for what we are doing. And, as we would like you to continue to help us, it would mean you wouldn't have to roam around the school" She stared at them for a moment, and then shot off to the basins at the far end. The three of them watched her for a moment, then went over to her.

"Why not use The Chamber?" She gave a loud laugh when they stared at her with their mouths open "What? It is a very secret room that only he" She gestured to Harry "Can get in to"

"We are just mad we didn't think of it ourselves" Sally smiled, then frowned "Does that mean you don't want to train with us?"

"Why dy'a think that?" The ghost floated back towards them.

"Because at the end of last year, you didn't..."

"You got rid of the creature" Myrtle beamed "The thing in The Chamber that killed me is gone, and you can use what remains for parts"

"How?"

"The skin of the basilisk makes very good magical armor, and other body parts are really useful to potion makers" Myrtle giggled at the looks of surprise she was getting "I have been in school for fifty years - does it surprise you that I might have learned a few things?"

"Sorry" Harry apologised "So - you will come with us?"

"Yes!" She turned back to the basin that lead down to the underground tunnel "Do you want to go now?"

"HARRY!! Stop doing that!" Sirius bent over and picked up the plate he had dropped when Harry had appeared in front of him.

"But it's fun!" He smirked, then his face turned serious "I just wanted to let you know that we have found a place to train, and a fourth person to train with"

"It is a good place? Somewhere where no one will catch you?"

"Oh yes" Harry smirked again "And it has a bonus prize that I think you are going to like" There was a period of silence as Sirius stared at him.

"Are you going to tell me? Or do I have to work out how to smack an Astrally Projected person on the head?"

"The Chamber Of Secrets"

"Really?"

"I am the only one who can get in... well I guess Voldemort can, but I am pretty sure someone would notice him coming through the school..."

"Given Dumbledore's record, maybe not"

"...and it doesn't appear on the map, so no one will know we are there" He started pacing back and forth "Myrtle - Riddle's first victim - has agreed to help us with the training. And, of course, it has the..."

"The remains of a thousand year old basilisk!" Sirius nearly jumped up and down for joy at the thought "Can you send the remains out to me without anyone noticing?"

"I think so, yes. Myrtle is going to help" He held his hand up "We have to go to class, so I should go"

"I won't be able to project myself to The Chamber" Sirius sighed "I need to have been there first"

"And you can't come here?"

"Dumbledore would wonder why" Sirius noticed the flicker in Harry's eyes "What? Has our esteemed Headmaster done something else to make your life more interesting?"

"Nothing" Sirius looked at him in disbelief "Really - Dumbledore didn't do anything"

"But something is bothering you, and it is related to him"

"Professor Lupin taught us about boggarts today"

"Wow. Remus is getting ambitious in his old age"

"Yes, well. Sally was confronted by a Death Eater"

"Because of her father?"

"Yes. And Hermione produced a dementor" He paused "And I..."

"DUMBLEDORE?" He shook his head as he realised what this would mean "I guess it made an impression on Moony?"

"To say the least. And Sal and Min are sure that he is going to go tell him" He watched his godfather pace back and forth "Lupin will tell Dumbledore"

"Yeah - he will" Sirius smiled "But the worst thing that can happen is it annoys him, and makes him re-evaluate the way he has been treating you"

"Okay" Harry walked up to him, then smirked "I need to learn the corporeal part of this spell. Not hugging you sucks!" He waved, then vanished. Sirius gave a laugh, then went back to his lunch.

Ginny looked up as the portrait hole opened, then back down as a sixth year came in.

She had been waiting for Harry for an hour after tea, but so far neither he, nor is little tarts, had shown up.

During the summer, she had had a lot of time to think, and to work out a whole new plan to win her handsome prince.

After the previous year, she had to appear to be nothing but friendly to all three of them. She didn't know if they knew that she had directed the attacks against the two girls, but she assumed they did, or at least she assumed they suspected her of doing it, so she was trying to make amends as best she could.

So far, it seemed to be working. Sally and Hermione were obviously following Harry's lead in being nice to her. Whether it was because they felt sorry for her, or if they really wanted to get to know her, Ginny had no idea, and couldn't really bring herself to care. The more time she got to spend with them, the more she could learn about her prince and his friends, the easier the next part of her plan would be.

Her brother sat down next to her.

"Need any help Gin?"

"I am going to ask Harry for help" She said, glancing at the entrance to the common room. Ron frowned, then shrugged.

"Anything I can do to help?" He asked softly. She turned and looked at him "If he is what you want, and he makes you happy, then I will do what I can" She smiled at him.

"Thanks"

Harry climbed through the portrait hole, and turned to offer a hand to Sally and Hermione.

"Are you going to tell our parents?" He asked Hermione.

"If I can be alone?" She looked around "Sal - could you?"

"Harry?" Harry turned to see Ginny looking up at them from one of the tables "Would you be able to help me with my charms homework?" He looked back at Sally, and when she took Hermione's hand, and nodded, he turned back.

"It would be a pleasure"

Dumbledore withdrew from the pensieve, still in denial about what he had seen. Sally's boggart was to be expected , and - as a muggle-born with an active imagination, it was easy to understand why she would fear dementors after only one meeting.

But Harry had faced dementors, a basilisk and Voldemort. Twice. And yet somehow the boy was more scared of him than anything else.

"What has his guardian been telling him?"

Chapter 6

Generally the morning of the first Hogsmeade visit of the year was filled with students discussing what they were going to do in the village :- the shops they would visit, sites they would see and so forth.

But the night before, just as the evening meal had finished, The Grey Lady had floated up behind the staff table and spoken to Dumbledore. A moment later, he had stood up.

"I am afraid you are all going to have to remain here for a little while" He announced "The ghosts have reported seeing a person near the Gryffindor common room who shouldn't be there, so the staff are going to search the castle. The prefects and ghosts will act as liaisons, and the Head Girl and Boy will be in charge"

The students spend two hours in the hall, and were eventually allowed back to their respective common rooms after no trace of the man was found.

As the students lined up to leave the next day, Dumbledore came down to address them.

"The visit will go ahead as planned, but there are a few rules that must be obeyed. All students must use the carriages - no one is to walk back from the village, even in groups, or if you have done it before. Secondly - you have to stay in the main boundaries of the village. There will be Aurors and staff members patrolling the area, and I do not want them to be overstretched" He paused, and looked around.

"Anyone caught breaking these rules will forfeit all Hogsmeade visits for the rest of the year, and will face other, more severe punishments" He nodded to Filch, and the students started to file out of the entrance hall.

When Harry, Sally and Hermione walked past him, he was tempted to call out to them, but he knew there was no real reason to stop them leaving the castle, or at least none that he would care to give

to them. The village would be crawling with Aurors, staff members and a few of the Order, and with the exception of the Aurors, they were all under firm instructions to keep a very close eye on Harry.

"Uncle Mike was right" Hermione said with a smile "This is nice!"

"You can't beat it" Sally replied with an equally big smile "My mum let me have some the night before I started school" She smiled fondly, then looked around "Good crowd"

"Yeah" Harry nodded at the few other Gryffindors sat at various tables "So - do you think Black will try to attack again?"

"Maybe" Hermione looked around the pub, then leaned forward "But if Black went to Hogwarts, wouldn't he know when we were in the great hall?"

"So... why would he try to break in to an empty common room?" Sally asked. Hermione nodded.

"Everyone thinks he has come back for Harry because..." She trailed off, looking puzzled "Sorry - why do we think that again?"

"Because it was the only rational explanation that made sense" Harry frowned "If Black did betray my parents to Voldemort, then I am the only Potter left. And if what Quirrell told us is true, then getting rid of me would make sense"

"But if Black got in to the school undetected, why not hide outside the hall?" Sally shook her head in confusion "Why not ambush the students as they came out? Why go to a completely empty room?"

They spent the rest of the day exploring the village, although they were told in no uncertain terms that the shrieking shack was off limits.

"Maybe next time" Harry said.

As the end of the day approached, the three of them made their way back to the pickup point.

"Have you enjoyed your day?" Harry asked Hermione as they waited for the coaches. She looked at him, and smiled faintly "What?"

"If I ask you a question, will you answer it honestly?"

"I will try"

"Would you have liked more time alone with Sal?" She looked up at him "I have started to feel like a gooseberry"

"It hadn't occurred to me" He leaned over and hugged her "I just had fun spending the day with both of you"

"Really?"

"You two are my best friends, Min, and that isn't going to change" He kissed her on the cheek. She smiled, then nodded, but her eyes widened as she saw Malfoy smirking at them. Harry turned to look at him, then turned back. "Do you really care what he thinks?"

"But if he starts telling people?"

"Do you really care?" He asked again, and Hermione smirked. He put his arm round her shoulders, and she rested her head on his shoulder.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, until Sally walked up to them. She gave them a smile, then sat down next to them to wait for the coaches.

"JAMES! IT'S HIM!!"
"TAKE HARRY AND GO!!"

"DAN! NO!!"

"OH GOD!! LUKE!!!"

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!"
"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!"
"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!"

"Harry? Are you awake?"

"Yes hon" He paused "What happened?"

"What do you remember?"

"We got out of the carriage, then Voldemort killed my dad..." He frowned at what he had just said "Dementors?"

"I woke up about half an hour ago, and from what I have overheard, we were swarmed by ten or twelve of them. They only surrounded us for about thirty seconds, then Lupin, Flitwick and Sprout came charging in with their patronuses... patroni? Anyway - they saved us"

"Any idea why they attacked us?"

"I don't know, but Dumbledore is FURIOUS with them, and is going to talk to the Minister"

"Do you think he will use it against us... where's Min?" He sat up and looked around "Where is she?"

"She returned to the common room before I woke up" Sally smiled "I have an idea as to why, but I will tell you when we get back"

"So - will Dumbledore use this to stop us going out in the future?"

"Maybe" She paused "Do you think if we ask Professor Lupin to teach us the Patronus Charm he would?"

"Hopefully" Harry sighed "Would you like to talk to the others about this?"

"I'll do it" She smiled "I think you'll do your dramatic thing and scare the too much..." She stopped as Harry threw a pillow at her. She yelped, then picked it up and threw it back, but before a full-scale-pillow-war could erupt, Madame Pomfrey came in to the room and smiled at them.

"Since you are obviously feeling better, you can both go back to your common room. But if either of you, or Miss Granger, feels any side effects, I want you to come back at once"

"Yes Madame Pomfrey"

A few days later, after an interesting DaDa class involving Red Caps, they stayed behind to talk to Lupin.

"I don't know if I can" Lupin smiled sadly "The patronus charm is very advanced magic, and it might be beyond you"

"Can we at least try?" Sally asked.

"May I ask why you fell the need to learn it?" He looked at them searchingly "You are not planning on using it to sneak past the dementors, are you?"

"You saw what happened after we came back from Hogsmeade" Hermione shivered at the memory "The dementors appear to be drawn to us, and if it keeps happening, we might have to stop going"

"Which might be what the Headmaster wants" Harry mumbled, then he smiled sheepishly as he realised Lupin looked at him curiously "Professor Dumbledore thinks that, with Black on the loose, I would be..."

"We would be"

"...be safer if we stayed in the castle grounds"

"And you disagree?"

"Black was seen in the castle less than a week ago" Sally looked up at the professor "Who's to say that if we stay here, while all the other students are in the village, he won't attack then?" They were a few minutes of silence as Lupin considered this, then he clapped his hands.

"Very well - I will teach you three, but remember - it might not be possible"

"We understand" Sally bounced to her feet "Can we start now?"

"I am afraid not" He shook his head "I am busy for the next two days, and then... well I won't be in a suitable condition for the three days after that" He looked at the diary on his desk "How about a week on Saturday?"

"The morning of the Slytherin match?" Sally asked in surprise.

"We will be finished by the time the match starts"

"Okay"

"Wow"

"I know"

"Is that really what my hair looks like from the back?"

"Since we can't bring a dementor into the school, I am going to have to ask as a big favour of Miss Granger" Professor Lupin looked at the three of them "After the events of our first lesson, I have found another boggart, and I believe that when it confronts Miss Granger..."

"Hermione"

"...it will react as the other one did" He smiled at her "This will be difficult for you, and I have to ask if you are sure?"

"Yes"

"Good" He picked up his wand "Now - as you know, the incantation is Expecto Patronum, but the words alone are not enough. The patronus charm is based on happy, positive memories - the happier and more positive the better" He turned, pointed his wand at the wall and said "Expecto Patronum".

A moment later, a white mist flew out of the wand, then coalesced into the shape of a tiger "As you can see, the shape of the patronus is generally an animal, and depends on the person" He waved his wand, and the tiger vanished.

"I would like you to think about your happy memories for a few minutes, and pick the one that makes you the happiest"

Harry's mind wandered, he thought about Sally, Hermione and his Uncle Mike. A picture of them over the holidays sprung into focus - they had gone to the park and spent the day playing with Lucky.

Hermione thought about school, then about the visit they had gone on at St Juliets to the zoo. Harry - or Aaron as he had been - had seen her being teased in front of the otter enclosure, and had come to her rescue.

Sally didn't need to think about it at all. When she had turned seven, her mother had taken her in to the loft of their home, and showed her a trunk.

"Your father wanted to share these with you, but obviously that wasn't to be" Susan smiled fondly "From the day he found out I was pregnant, he started making memories, and storing them for you to see later" She opened the trunk to reveal a pensieve, and phial upon phial of small, white strands of memories "Some of them are mine, some of them are Dan's, but they are all meant for you"

Sally had picked out the phial marked as Number One. She stared at it for a moment, then she poured it in to the stone bowl. She took a deep breath, then touched the surface.

"Hello my girl"

"Are you all ready?" Lupin asked them, and they all nodded, so he turned to Hermione "Hermione - are you sure?"

"Yes" She gulped "Lets do it"

"Okay"

Half an hour later, he brought the session to an end.

"Well done - all of you" He beamed, handing them each a bar of chocolate.

"But we didn't produce an animal" Harry frowned.

"The fact you produced anything at all on your first attempt is very impressive, and better than I thought. But you are all tired, and if you continue, it will take you longer to recover, and might attract the attention of Madame Pomfrey. So - we can continue this next week, but not before"

"Yes sir" They all nodded.

"And I suggest you take a nap before the game this afternoon - we don't want you falling asleep during Gryffindor's victory" He stared at them when they started laughing "What?"

"You haven't followed Hogwarts Quidditch recently, have you sir?" Hermione asked. When Lupin shook his head, she continued "Gryffindor haven't won the cup for nearly ten years, and in the last two years..."

"One win, one draw and four losses" Sally smirked "And even though we came second last year, we lost by over seven hundred points, and the year before... last place by over a thousand points" Lupin stared at her for a moment, then shook himself to clear his head.

"Sorry if this sounds rude, but you don't seem to care very much"

"We are not exactly well liked by our housemates, and so we don't have the urge to live and die with the fortunes of our team" She looked at her watch "We should go"

Three hours later, they walked down to the pitch with the rest of the school, and watched the two teams come out.

"Welcome to the first match of the season. Gryffindor come from a relatively good result last year, while Slytherin, despite being kitted out with the best brooms on the market, have to come back from a humiliating last place" Lee Jordan waited for the boos that comment generated to subside, then continued "And, as Madam Hooch rises to the middle of the pitch, we are ready for the off"

"They seem to be doing well" Professor Lupin sat down behind them "Better than I would have believed from what you said before"

"Last year Malfoy's dad gave the whole team new brooms - Nimbus 2001s" Sally said, still watching the game "They are too powerful for the chasers, and far too powerful for the keeper. The only reason they beat Gryffindor last year is that Hagan is crap"

"So the Gryffindor chasers do well, because the Slytherin chasers and keeper have a serious problem?"

"Pretty much" Sally turned "Malfoy isn't that good either, so he only really does well against Gryffindor" There was another cheer as Katie Bell scored, then suddenly the whole stadium fell silent, as if someone had cast a global silencing spell. Even the players had come to a halt in mid-air, looking around.

"What... what's going on?" Hermione asked quietly.

"Screaming" Harry whispered. Then he sat bolt upright, and turned to Lupin "My mother is screaming" Lupin nodded in understanding, and jumped to his feet. He ran over to the steps, and up to the staff box. After a few minutes of intense discussion, the Headmaster stood up.

"All students are to return to the castle at once. Go up the main path, and do not stray from it. All staff who can cast a patronus are to report to me, all others are to ensure the students return safely" He turned to Lupin, and they, and four more staff members, walked out of the box.

"Come on - lets be 'aving ya" Hagrid had come on to the stands, and was shepherding the Gryffindors down the path, and back up to the school. Harry, Hermione and Sally went with him. As they walked back up the path, they saw a veritable zoo of misty white animals charging across the lawns. A moment later, the black cloud that had been swarming towards the students was forced to recede.

He watched the fight, and smiled. His master had been right - the dementors had proven a suitable diversion. After he had been seen in his last incursion, he knew security would be tighter. So having the dementors attack the Quidditch match had ensured that his entry would be unobserved.

He walked up to the school, then transformed and scurried up the main stairs.

Chapter 7

"After yesterday's match was disrupted, the Heads Of House, and the two captains, met with Madame Hooch to decide whether the match should be replayed, declared a tie" Dumbledore saw some of the Gryffindors' heads shoot up in surprise "Despite the fact that Gryffindor was ten points ahead, the two Heads of House and Madame Hooch both felt that, since the snitch hadn't been caught, the game could have gone either way" The Gryffindors, mostly lead by Ron Weasley, seemed to calm down, but Ron was still glaring across the hall "So - given the choice of a tied game, or a chance to play the game to a result, the unanimous choice was to reply the game" He looked around at the surprised faces "So next Sunday, following the Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw game on the Saturday, Gryffindor and Slytherin will once again entertain us with their skills"

There was muted applause from the Gryffindor table, while the other three houses clapped more enthusiastically.

"And, as Malfoy catches the snitch, the Slytherins take the match by ten points" Lee Jordan sighed "And Gryffindor lose, again, despite some outstanding play by the team"

"Third place" Harry said "It could be worse" Sally stared at him "If Ravenclaw hadn't been on such a rampage yesterday, we would have been fourth with no real way back"

"I suppose" She looked around as they walked back to the castle "But the only way Gryffindor can catch up is with a snitch catch, and that is beyond Hagan" She smiled "I would say we are done for this year"

"You never know - maybe Hagan will get injured, and Gryffindor will get a good seeker" He saw her smirk "Well - a better seeker"

"So - tomorrow?"

"Is this a cue to say 'Is only a day away?'" She asked, then burst out laughing when Harry stared at her in surprise "What?"

"How does the pureblood daughter of a pureblood family know about Little Orphan Annie?" Sally stared at him, then started laughing again. When she had calmed down, she hugged him.

"Hermione introduce me to it" She said as they walked into the entrance hall "She thought I should know what your favourite film was as a kid" For the third time she laughed at the expression on his face.

"I am going to have to punish her for that, aren't I?"

"Maybe" She smirked, then her face turned serious again "So - tomorrow?"

"Halloween"

"Yes" She took his hand "Twelve years"

"Huh?" He looked at her with a blank expression, then smiled "Oh - yes. But that's not what I meant" They started walking again "First year there was a troll. Last year there was a giant snake..."

"And you think this year won't be any better?"

"With Black on the loose? I think the curse might still be in effect"

"Well - whatever happens we will face it together" She kissed his cheek "Come on - let's go find Minnie and get some practice in before tea"

"Still worried?" Hermione asked during the feast the next night.

"A little" Harry replied, looking around. The day had gone by relatively peacefully, although Malfoy and his cronies had spent some of the day gloating over their victory, and Ron, and some of the other Gryffindors had lost a fair amount of points by rising to the bait. Snape had been particularly vindictive, taking 40 points in a single lesson.

"We won't let anything bad happen" Sally said "And given the increased security, he would have to be crazy to come after you"

"So the crazy man would have to be crazy to come after me?" Harry smirked "You really know how to comfort me, sweetie" Sally slapped him on the arm, then looked up in surprise as the enchanted ceiling turned pitch-black.

"What..." Harry trailed off as something appeared in the darkened roof. As it came in to focus, Harry heard a gasp of surprise from the top table, and turned to see Dumbledore, McGonagall and Snape moving towards the door at the back of the hall. Professors Flitwick and Lupin had stood up, and were moving round to the front of the table.

"It would appear there has been an attack in the castle" Flitwick said calmly "So I will have to ask everyone to stay here until the Headmaster returns" Harry watched the two professors for a moment, then turned back to his girlfriend. She smiled sheepishly at him.

"Okay - so maybe the crazy man is crazy"

Four hours later, just as Lupin was considering sorting out sleeping bags and posting guards, the Headmaster came back into the hall.

"I am very sorry for keeping you here for so long, and I will be happy to give you an explanation in the morning. Due to the lateness of the hour, morning classes are canceled, and breakfast will be ninety minutes later than usual" He walked up the hall, to where Lupin and Flitwick were stood. He exchanged a few words with them, then turned back to face the students "You will be escorted back to your common rooms by two members of staff and the prefects. The Head Boy and Girl will remain here to discuss future security arrangements" Harry watched Percy stride to the front of the hall, then he, Sally and Hermione turned to follow the rest of the students out of the hall.

"So - another attack on the common room when we were all in the hall?" Sally asked. When they had returned to Gryffindor Tower, it had been obvious what had triggered the warning - the portrait of The Fat Lady had been torn to shreds, and the lady herself was now taking refuge with a portrait of the War Wizards Of Taunton.

"You think he is after something else? Or someone else?" Harry looked at Hermione, who shrugged.

"It would make sense. Both times he has broken in to the castle, he has done it when every student would be in The Great Hall. But he didn't go there - he came here"

"He could wait here to attack me when I came in" Harry suggested.

"But how could he be sure you would be the first one in? If he started killing kids at random, then not only would he not get you, he would also be caught"

"So - what could he want?" Harry looked around "What is worth risking The Kiss for?"

On the other side of the common room, Ginny was talking to her brother.

"I need to borrow him" She glanced over at the three students "I have an idea"

"Do you think Scabbers can help?"

"Yes - but it means I have to lose him, and get Harry to help me look for him" Ron looked at her doubtfully "Trust me"

"Okay. I will bring him down tomorrow"

A week later, Lupin informed them they could have another patronus lesson that evening. When they had arrived at his classroom, he stood in front of them.

"Sorry for the delay, but with Black coming to the castle again, the Headmaster is understandably concerned about the safety of his students"

"Professor - can I ask you something?" Harry said.

"Of course"

"Uncle Mike told me about The Marauders, and the friendship between my dad and Sirius Black"

"Okay"

"They were closer than brothers"

"So everyone thought"

"Do you really believe he betrayed my parents?"

"All the evidence..."

"In your heart" He stared at Lupin "Do you think he could?" Lupin stared back at him for a while, then shrugged.

"I don't know. I wouldn't have thought so, but on the other hand You-Know-Who was very good at finding people's weaknesses, and exploiting them for his own gain. And if Sirius was innocent, why did he go on the run? Why hide for so long? Why behave like he is guilty?"

"I don't know" Harry shrugged in response "So - patronus?"

Half an hour later, Lupin held his hand up.

"I think we should take a break" He sighed "This isn't going as well as I had hoped"

"You said it might be hard" Hermione replied hopefully.

"I know, but... you don't seem to be making any progress at all. And I can't keep exposing you to dementors if it isn't getting you anywhere" He watched as Sally gave Hermione a hug, then Harry followed "Hold on - I would like to try something. Hermione, stand there, and you two - one on either side of her" When they had lined up as he asked, he walked over to the wardrobe the boggart was hiding in "Now - when I let it out, I want you all to cast at the same time. And while I want you to think about your happiest memories, I also want you to think about each other" He saw them nod "Okay" He pulled the wardrobe open, and shivered as a dementor floated out. He turned to see the three students raise their wands.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!"

He smiled as three misty animals burst into existence, and surged towards the dementor. They came close to it, then vanished.

"Hermione - boggart!" He yelled.

"Ridikulas!" The dementor started singing, then backed away. Lupin cast a second charm, and then forced it back into the wardrobe. He then turned and beamed at all of them.

"Well done!! All of you - that was very, very impressive" He looked at them, but they were too dumbfounded to say anything "Can I ask about the animals?"

"My dad" Sally said softly "It was his animagus form, and the reason he was so good at flying"

"I made my first real friend at a zoo, when I was being teased by the otter enclosure" She resisted the urge to smile at Harry.

"And your dog?" Lupin asked Harry.

"Uncle Mike had a dog when we were in America. Lucky was adorable, but we couldn't bring him across with us" He noticed Lupin looking at him strangely "So - can we try again?"

"No, not tonight" He smiled at their downcast faces "For one thing, Hermione needs rest, and I don't want to over expose any of you to dementors. So take this, and I will walk you back to the tower"

As they walked back, Sally turned to their teacher.

"Professor Lupin?"

"Yes Sally?"

"If Black is after Harry, why is he attacking the common room when it is empty?"

"Because... I don't know"

"You know how strange this feels?"
"Oh yes"
"How do you think I feel?"
"Who's that?"
"Miranda"
"Wow"
"I know"

Sirius turned, and looked calmly at the ghostly figure in front of him.

"Hello Minnie" He smiled, then his mouth fell open as another figure appeared beside the first.

"Hello Uncle Mike" Both Hermione's said in unison.

"So" Sirius said, recovering himself "You have learned how to manipulate the projection then?"

"Yes Uncle Mike" The two images spoke in unison again.

"Okay - stop that. It's creepy" Sirius frowned, then he gasped in surprise as the figured in front of him morphed into Harry and Sally
"Wow"

"If you are curious, Min is back in The Chamber, keeping an eye on us - as you asked"

"I am glad to hear it" Sirius smiled "When is the next Hogsmeade weekend?"

"First weekend in December" Sally said "I think it was brought forward by two weeks because of the security concerns"

"Any news on that?" Harry asked, but Sirius shook his head.

"After Black's last visit to Hogwarts, Minister Fudge has been keeping me well informed, but Black seems to be hiding for the moment" He saw the smile on Harry's face "I am aware of the comedy aspect of The Minister keeping me up to date on Black's movements" He smiled as the two figures laughed, then continued "I have something to give you, but I can't send it by owl - it is too delicate"

"What is it?"

"An astral beacon" Sirius replied "I won't go into the details, since neither of you are actually Minnie, but simply put it projects a signal in to the astral plane that someone can track back to the source. It will lead me back to The Chamber, and when I have been there once, I will be able to find it in the future" He saw Sally open her mouth "When I meet you in Hogsmeade, I will tune it in to our auras, and that will stop anyone else from using it" Sally closed her mouth again and Sirius smiled.

"Until then, keep practicing changing your images - try different people and animals, and once you are happy with that, try projecting the image over yourself. But only do that one at a time - understand?" There was a moment where they stared at him, then suddenly Sirius was facing two copies of himself.

"Yes Uncle Mike"

Remus Lupin leaned back in his chair, and considered the events of the last few weeks.

When Dumbledore had asked him to take the defence position, Lupin had been surprised - a werewolf teaching in Hogwarts was unusual to say the least. When he had queried it with the Headmaster, Dumbledore had admitted that - after Quirrell and Lockheart - he wanted someone who he knew personally, and who could do the job.

Dumbledore had also told him about Harry's recent history, and the concerns he had about Michael Whiteheart - Harry's American guardian. But from his observations of the three lions, both during the patronus lessons and the regular defence classes, Lupin wasn't sure what the Headmaster was worried about.

All three of them were nice, friendly kids who were very loyal to each other, but also willing to keep his secret because they knew it was the right thing to do.

The questions they had asked about Sirius Black had also made him think.

After his old friend had betrayed the Potters - betrayed the entire wizarding world - he hadn't given him much thought. But after talking to the kids, he was starting to see things in a different light - one that differed radically from the view of the other senior staff. And he had also started thinking about his school days.

Despite his rash nature, Sirius had not been stupid when he was at school, and - o the four friends that made up The Marauders - Black and Potter were by far and away the best at making foolproof plans.

Dumbledore insisted that Black had returned to kill or kidnap Harry, but, Remus thought, Harry and his friends had a point. If Black wanted Harry dead, Harry would be dead by now.

So that left Lupin with the obvious, if unbelievable, question.

If Sirius Black wasn't trying to kill Harry, then what was he his ultimate goal?

Chapter 8

"What's wrong with you two?" Hermione watched Harry and Sally come in to The Chamber. She had never seen them looking so down, and given they were meeting Sirius and Susan the day after, she found it very surprising they weren't bouncing around like puppies on speed.

"Sally and I have had a busy morning" Harry sighed "Broke a few school records, pissed off any Gryffindor that didn't already hate us, and more than likely put our glorious house out of the running for The House Cup this year"

Hermione stared at them in total silence for a moment.

"Did you kill someone? Did you hex Dumbledore's phoenix?" She ran through all the possibilities in her head "Did you annoy Snape?" Both her friends laughed at her last suggestion, but shook their heads.

"How much do you know about the Muggle Studies class?" Sally asked when they had calmed down.

"Not a lot" Hermione replied "But if the books in the library are anything to go by, I am guessing it could be a little better?"

"We've had about 20 lessons so far" Harry looked at Sally, who nodded in confirmation "So far, they have covered steam engines, ironclads, muskets, dueling laws and The Boer War" He watched Hermione's reaction, but she kept looking at him "Did I mention these come under the heading of current events, and not history?" He burst out laughing as Hermione's mouth fell open and she sat down on the floor with a bump.

"Dare I ask... anything about TV? Cars? Electricity?"

"No" Harry shook his head. Hermione stared at him, shaking her head in disbelief, then took his hand and stood up.

"So - what happened today?"

"Well - after our first few lessons, Harry started teaching me about his world - the muggle world of today" Sally said "And it helped me keep up to date"

"But today... well today didn't go well"

(flashback)

"...of course, there are a lot of muggles who have good imaginations. A muggle story writer named G.H.Wills said men will, one day, walk on the moon. Of course this is utter foolishness, but it does show how muggles are willing to see beyond their own limits... Yes, Mr Potter?" Professor Grayson looked over as Harry raised his hand.

"Man landed on the moon in 1969"

"Nonsense - it isn't possible"

"Two men - Armstrong and Aldrin - walked on the moon nearly thirty years ago"

"Ten points from Gryffindor for lying"

"I'm not lying"

"How could they travel that far in their bi-planes?"

"Muggles have planes that fly four times the speed of sound..."

"Don't be ridiculous, Potter - they would melt from the heat"

"But..."

"Twenty more points, and if you don't stop, and I mean now, it will be another twenty" She stared at Harry, but he didn't open his mouth, he simply glared at her "Now, where was I? Oh yes - muggles seeing beyond their own, limited existance. But while they sometimes use this for good, they also can use it for bad. The same G.H.Wills..."

"H.G.Wells" Harry muttered under his breath.

"...also wrote about the power to destroy a city, which is clearly ludicrous... Yes Miss Perks?"

"Why is it ludicrous?"

"If Wizards can't create a curse to destroy a whole city, then it would be impossible for Muggles to do that"

"Have you ever heard of Hiroshima?"

"No"

"Not surprising - it was completely destroyed in 1945" Sally said softly "With a single, muggle bomb"

"Thirty points, Miss Perks... Mr Potter?" She stared at him as he stood up and tidied his stuff away "What do you think you are doing?"

"I am going to find a teacher who knows how to teach their subject"
He turned to Sally "Sal?"

"I thought you would never ask" She flung her stuff in to her bag, and, together with Harry, walked towards the door.

"If you don't sit down now, it will be forty more points and a failure for the year" Grayson yelled, but the two students didn't even slow their stride as they walked out the room.

(end flashback)

"100 points? And a FAILED class?"

"Breathe Min!" Sally smirked, and Hermione glared at her.

"But..."

"We know" Harry smiled "But it's not like we were going to learn anything from the class anyway, and I am long past caring about points"

"What about detentions?"

"Professor Grayson punished us for what we did" Sally smiled "No further punishments are allowed"

"Oh" Hermione paused "So - do you want to train?"

Dinner that evening was very trying. Everyone at the Gryffindor table was alternating between ignoring them, and glaring at them.

"Do you think Dumbledore will want to see me tonight?" Sally asked.

"Maybe" Harry looked up at the staff table, and wasn't surprised to see the Gryffindor Head Of House staring back at him. Because of their loss of points, Gryffindor now had a sum total of 5 points towards The House Cup, and it was very unlikely they would finish anywhere other than last, let alone win "But what can he do? We both have enough classes to pass the year, and, if we explain the situation to Uncle Mike and Aunt Sue, I think they will understand"

"I suppose" Sally looked over at Hermione "Are your parents coming tomorrow?"

"Maybe Mum, but Dad has to work"

"Cool"

"Mr Potter..." Professor McGongall came up behind them, but Harry didn't let her finish.

"Let me guess. Professor Dumbeldore would like to see me in his office"

"After your appalling display in Professor Grayson's class, what did you expect?" Harry stood up, smiled at his friends, then followed McGonagall out of the hall.

"Would you care to explain yourself?" The Headmaster stared at him "Professor Grayson came to see me with a story of you being rude, disrupting class and encouraging others to misbehave as well"

"She told me man would never walk on the moon" Harry replied calmly "When I told her they already had, she called me a liar. Then she called Sally a liar. And her knowledge of the muggle world is a joke"

"Professor Grayson is one of our most respected teachers, and an expert in her subject"

"She knows nothing about the muggle world, sir, and if purebloods base their views of muggles on what she has been teaching, it is little wonder that they spend so much time looking down on muggles and the muggle-born students"

"Well - that, I am sure, is a debate for another day. Right now we have to decide what to do about your display this morning, and your future in Professor Grayson's class"

"I am not going back to her class" Harry said "Neither is Sally"

"May I ask why?"

"Because I learned more in a week in my muggle junior school than I have in a term in Professor Grayson's. And I really don't see the point of going to any more of her lessons"

"And Miss Perks feels the same?"

"Yes, sir"

"Very well. I will inform Professor McGonagall and Professor Grayson of your decision. That only leaves the matter of your behaviour in class"

"Professor Grayson has already deducted 100 points, and failed us both for the year" Harry replied calmly "I thought we couldn't be punished twice"

"That is true, but I had hoped to prevail upon you to apologise to Professor Grayson" Harry stared at him in surprise, then shrugged.

"If we can do it in private, just me, Sal and Professor Grayson"

"Miss Perks will agree to this?"

"I will ask her, but I will do it even if she doesn't"

"Very well. I will arrange for you, and Miss Perks, to meet with Professor Grayson before you go to Hogsmeade"

"Thank you" Harry stood up "I suppose it is too much to hope you will consider changing the muggle studies course for future years?"

"I will take it under advisement"

"I apologise for knowing more about your subject than you do"

"I am sorry I made it obvious in class that you have no idea about the muggle world"

"I am sorry for disrupting class by telling the truth"

Harry looked at his reflection in the mirror, then shrugged.

"It's the thought that counts"

"Wow" Claire Granger looked around the wizarding village, her mouth open in wonder at everything she was seeing.

"It's pretty cool, isn't it?" Susan smiled as she, Claire and Sirius walked along the main street towards the pub where they were meeting their children.

"It's amazing" She turned and smiled at them "Thank you for asking me to come"

"You're welcome" Sirius smiled back "The kids should be there by now"

"How do you want to handle the whole muggle studies thing?" Susan asked "Come down hard?"

"Do you think they were wrong?" Claire asked "I mean - aside from the way they behaved, do you think they were wrong to tell the truth?"

"No" Sirius shook his head, then smiled at Susan "Present company excepted, the vast majority of the purebloods in this country have no inclination to learn about the muggle world, and those that do - like Arthur Weasley - still have no clue about it" He looked around "If Sally and Harry can change that, I say good for them. And if I was in their position, I might have done the same thing"

"So - we listen to what they have to say, and go from there?" Susan asked. Sirius nodded, and they continued towards The Three Broomsticks.

"Before you start" Sally held up her hand "Harry and I apologised to Professor Grayson for disrupting her class before we left school this morning"

"But you are not going back to it?"

"No" Harry replied "If we wanted to study history, we would. And even though, as Min pointed out, 'it might be fascinating to study the muggle world from a wizard point of view'..."

"I believe I said interesting" Hermione said with a smirk.

"... we both think we can spend our time in more productive ways"

"Are you going to take another class?" Claire asked "Arithmency?"

"God no" Sally smirked "Neither of us are smart enough for that"

"And nothing else fits in to our timetables" Harry added, then smiled "Two free periods a week won't be so bad - we can do homework, revise, put the time to good use" He saw Sirius smirking at him "Yes, Uncle Mike?"

"You can't think of anything better than revision or homework to do?" He asked in mock surprise, then shrunk back as both Sally and her mother turned to glare at him "So - have you decided what you want to do for Christmas?"

Two hours later, the six of them walked out of the pub together.

"Would you like to look around the village?" Hermione asked her mother.

"If that's okay?" Claire looked at them "You don't have to get back?"

"Not for a little while" Hermione looked at her watch "An hour or so"

"Okay then" The group walked down the street, with the two magical adults pointing things out to the others in the group.

"And over there..." Sirius turned, then trailed off as he saw a man walking down the street towards him.

"Mike?" Susan turned, and caught sight of who Sirius was staring at "Remus?"

"Susan" Remus Lupin smiled at her "It has been a while"

"You are teaching here now?"

"Albus asked me to fill in for a year" He looked at the three students "But you didn't hear that from me"

"Of course not" Hermione smiled "But why only a year?"

"His first choice, for want of a better phrase, was unavailable and can't start until next year. So he asked me if I would like to fill in for the year, and given my circumstances, I could hardly refuse"

"Who's he got lined up?" Susan asked.

"The former head of the Auror Corps, Alastor Moody"

"Mad-Eye Moody?" Sally exclaimed, causing Remus to turn and stare at her "My father mentioned him a few times"

"Oh" Remus paused, then shrugged "Anyway - Alastor will be here next year, and I am only hear until then" He looked at the other two adults, and smiled.

"Oh - sorry Professor" Sally looked sheepish "This is my Uncle Mike and my Aunt Claire"

"Harry's guardian and Hermione's mother?"

"Pleased to meet you, Professor Lupin" Sirius shook his hand.

"James never mentioned you" Remus stared at him "So how did you end up as Harry's Uncle?"

"Dumbledore didn't tell you?" Susan asked with a smirk, causing Remus to look at her curiously "Sorry - my problems"

"No - the Headmaster hasn't told me. Although he indicated that he doesn't think Mr Whiteheart is a suitable guardian for Harry"

"Let me guess - he thinks that Harry would be better off with Petunia?" Sirius snorted "He has given me that impression as well" He looked at Lupin "What do you think?"

"I don't know you, Mr Whiteheart, but from what I remember of Lily's sister, I can't imagine a worse parent for any child, let alone a magical one" He looked over at Harry "And, from what I have seen, Harry doesn't seem the type to put up with something when he doesn't want to"

"I put up with Dumbledore, don't I?" Harry whispered to the girls, causing them to laugh.

"How I was lucky enough to become Harry's guardian and Uncle is a long story, and one I would be glad to share with you some other time" Sirius looked at the three students "Are you ready to go back to the school?"

"Yes, Uncle Mike" They replied in unison, then various hugs were exchanged.

"OH - Harry - here you go" Sirius handed Harry a small box "Consider it an early Christmas present"

"Thanks!" Harry smiled "I will open it when I get back" He took Sally's hand "We will see you at Christmas!" Remus span round and stared at him "Sir?"

"The Headmaster lead me to believe you would be staying in the castle for Christmas"

"I am sure he did" Susan said with a frown "But since when does the great and powerful Dumbledore have so much of a say in his students' lives?"

"Hermione?"

"Yes?"

"You've been very quiet since we got back"

"Have I?"

"Is something wrong?"

"Maybe"

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not yet"

"Okay"

"This sucks" Hermione thought to herself as her friend walked away.

Chapter 9

Potter - why isn't your name on the list of students who are staying in school for Christmas?" Professor McGonagall loomed over them at lunch the week after the Hogsmeade visit.

"Because I am going home to my Uncle"

"Professor Dumbledore has expressed some concern over your safety"

"You do surprise me" Harry only realised he had spoken aloud when Sally tried to cover a laugh with a cough and Hermione gasped in surprise.

"I beg your pardon?" Professor McGonagall glared down at him.

"Would Professor Dumbledore like to discuss his concerns, or would he like me to dismiss them out of hand?"

"Mr Potter!! You will not speak of the Headmaster with such contempt"

"Professor McGonagall..." Harry trailed off and looked around "I apologise - whatever problems I have with the Headmaser, I should not air them in public"

"Very well - I will tell Professor Dumbledore that you are going home" She turned and walked back to the staff table, leaving Harry staring after her. He turned back to Hermione and Sally.

"I am really getting sick of this"

"I know, but what can you do?"

"Leave Hogwarts? Get him fired? Fake my own death and come back as a guy named Paul?" He shrugged "At least it is only two weeks until we break up for the holidays"

"You don't think Dumbledore can stop you?" Hermione asked "I mean... can he prevent you from going home?"

"I don't think so" Harry looked at Sally, who shrugged "Once term finishes, he has no authority over students who aren't staying. I

think" He looked up at the Head table, where Dumbledore and McGonagall were conversing "I hope"

"ARRGGGGHHH!!!"

Harry jolted awake and looked around, already reaching for his wand and glasses. With a quick flick of his wrist, the curtains flew aside, and he saw Ron sitting up, terror etched on his face.

"Ron?" He stood up, and then crossed over to the red-head's bed
"Are you alright?"

"He... he was here!!!" Ron yelled, waking up the rest of the room.

"Who was here?"

"Sirius Black!!"

"In light of the attack on one of the Gryffindor students" Professor Dumbledore announced the next morning "We have decided to bring term to an end a week early, and let you all return home" He paused and looked around.

"For those of you who are staying, you will get to see a complete upgrade and overhaul of the wards and defences of Hogwarts" He smiled "By the time the rest of you return at the start of the next term, I promise there will be no more attacks"

"You are still intent on going home?" The Headmaster looked across his desk at Harry "It would be far safer for you to stay here, in the school"

"Last night, in the school where I would be safe, Sirius Black was in my dorm room, with a knife at the throat of a student" Harry sighed "Since I can say for certain that Sirius Black has never been in my bedroom with a knife at my throat, which of them would you describe as safer?"

"What about the train? And the trip from King's Cross?"

"If you think the train is in danger, are you going to put guards on it?"

"If you would stay here, I do not believe the train would be at risk"

"Because Black is after me, and me alone?" Harry asked, then continued "If that is what you believe, okay"

"Okay you will stay?" Dumbledore looked surprised.

"No, sir" Harry shook his head "But I will find an alternative way of getting home, so that the train won't be attacked - at least because of me"

"And if I forbid you to go?"

"Would you really want to?"

"Is it so hard to believe that I only want the best for you?" Harry stared at him for a moment, then shrugged.

"I believe that you believe that, sir" He replied "But the past two years tell a different story" There was a long pause, then Dumbledore sighed.

"I withdraw my objections to you leaving for the holiday, and I will provide extra security for the train if you wish to take it home"

"Thank you sir, but I believe my Uncle already made alternative plans for all of us"

"All of you?"

"Despite what you might think, my Uncles and Aunts are not unaware of the danger, so rather than have our little group running between houses, they are all going to stay with us"

"Oh"

"May I go now, sir?"

"By all means" Dumbledore watched him leave, then shook his head in despair. The boy was the only hope they had to stop Voldemort once and for all, and he was wasting his time with pointless relationships and petty games. His Uncle had far too much influence

over him, and young Miss Perks was a distraction that Harry could no longer afford, and one that had to be brought to an end.

"Welcome to our house!" Sirius said "After a little adjusting, we have split the first floor in to three wings - one for each of the families, so you can all have your privacy" He turned to Harry and Sally "But not THAT much privacy" They both blushed bright red, and glared at him.

"So - do you have any plans for the holiday?" Susan asked Hermione's parents.

"Spend time with Hermione" Claire replied "And, if what Michael tells us is true, see what our daughter has been learning for the past two years"

"And hopefully we can go out, at least once in a while"

"Sounds like a good plan!

When they looked back on the holiday, Harry, Sally and Hermione all agreed it was the best Christmas they had had since they started Hogwarts. With the possible exception of the last Saturday, they had a relaxing time, with the training, and the occasional demonstrations of what they had been learning for their parents.

When they asked her later, Hermione would admit she enjoyed it less than her two friends. Even though she would not have dreamed of mentioning it to either of them, she couldn't help but notice Harry and Sally were spending more time alone together, and she was finding herself with nothing to do.

She was happy for her friends, but she was also a little lonely.

"Auror Finch" Sirius smiled "It is very nice to see you once again"

"Mr Whiteheart, Mrs Perks, Doctors Granger" The team leader nodded in return "Are you all ready to go?"

"My parents are staying here" Hermione said from behind them, but the rest of us are coming"

"Okay" The Auror looked at her team, and - when she nodded - half of them walked to the floo vanished "Same plan as before"

"Okay" Sirius nodded, then looked at the others "Are you all armed?"

"Yes Uncle Mike"

"And you all have your portkeys back to base?"

"Yes Uncle Mike" They repeated. Sirius smirked, then turned back to Finch.

"We are at your disposal"

"So - is there anything any of you want to do?" Susan asked. They had been shopping in Diagon Alley for an hour, and were getting ready to call it a day. Hermione raised her hand in the air "Min? Why are you putting your hand up?"

"Force of habit?" Sally suggested, causing both Harry and Hermione to laugh.

"I wanted to go to The Magical Menagerie" She smiled "I wanted to get a pet"

"Why?" Harry looked at her "I mean - why now, and not two years ago?"

Hermione looked at him, then she slowly lowered her gaze to where his hand was entwined with Sally's. She looked up again.

"Can we talk about it when we get home?" She asked pleadingly, seeing the worried looks on their faces. They both nodded, and the group set off down the road to the magical pet store.

"So - what are you looking for?" Sally asked. They had paused outside the shop to allow two members of Finch's team to secure the shop.

"I was thinking about a cat maybe - or an owl" She shrugged, then - when Aurors Smith and Jones came back and nodded "I think I will go with a cat, if I can find one that I like" They walked in to the shop, and almost at once Hermione found a small, jet-black kitten.

"Cute" Sally said with a smile.

"Isn't she" Hermione cooed, stroking the fur and listening to the kitten purr under her touch "What do you think?"

"She's adorable" Sally smiled, then glanced over to where Harry was looking around "And far cuter than... is that a baby tiger?" Hermione turned round to see a large, ginger cat jump in to Harry's arms.

"Oh my!" Hermione smiled as Harry wrestled with the cat for a moment, then she gave a small laugh when he toppled over backwards, still swamped in red fur.

Sally had to smother a smile as she glared at Hermione, then rushed over to help her boyfriend. Hermione watched them struggle to subdue the giant ball of fluff, then looked back at the kitten in front of her.

"Okay then" As she made up her mind.

"So - do you think Minnie is going to tell them?" Susan asked "Or are we going to have to have a talk with them?"

"Hopefully she will do it herself" Sirius looked up as the three kids and six Aurors came down the street towards them.

"Oh come on - who in their right mind would want a cat like that when they can have one like this?"

"Who in their right mind what want a cat like that at all?"

"So - what do you think?" Susan looked at them, unable to see what Hermione had chosen "Cat or Owl?"

"Probably a..." Sirius stopped as he saw something out of the corner of his eye, and casually turned his head to confirm what he thought. A moment later, he turned back and slowly pulled out his wand. Susan watched him, then did the same.

Harry came to a sudden halt, surprising the Aurors around him, as well as Sally and Hermione. He held up his hand to quieten them for a moment, then his eyes widened, and he slowly leaned over to Auror Jones, and whispered in her ear.

She looked around, then, before the three kids could react, an Auror took a hold of each of them, and a moment later they vanished from the Alley.

"They are safe?"

"Yes"

"Then lets do it" They three remaining Aurors joined up with the six guarding Sirius and Susan. They continued to watch the man Sirius had noticed earlier, until he walked down a side street.

"I know this will sound annoying, but we can't open fire first" Auror Finch said softly, then looked at Sirius "Especially you. Self-defence is fine, but... well imagine what Dumbledore would do if the legal guardian of his prize student was arrested for attacking an innocent man?"

"I can just picture it" Sirius smirked, then his face became serious "But I don't think it will be a problem" He gestured, and they all drew their wands as six men in dark robes and white masks came round the corner, lead by the unmistakable figure of Sirius Black.

"LET US GO!!!" Harry yelled at the three Aurors facing him.

"No"

"My Uncle is back there"

"I know, but still - no"

"We have to help him!"

"We are" Sally said from behind him. He turned and glared at her "If we were there, then he would be worried about protecting us as well, and doing that might get him killed"

"Besides" Hermione added "We aren't good enough to fight Black yet"

"But..."

"He and mum will be back soon" Sally said, taking his arm "And in the meantime, we can help Minnie pick out a name for her new pet" She looked at the kitten snuggled in Hermione's arms "Though, after today, I think we should probably give 'Blackie' a miss"

Sirius looked around, and smiled. The eleven of them had dealt with the attackers with ease, but the person posing as him had apparated away when the fight started going against him.

Five minutes after he had vanished, a dozen more Aurors had appeared on the scene, then - after a quick conference with Finch - Sirius and Susan had been questioned, and then told they could leave.

"Will there be a report on this?" Susan asked.

"There will have to be" Finch replied "But you will be both be okay. You got the kids to safety, and then set about protecting the Alley" She looked around "And you did it without anyone dying"

"And you don't think Dumbledore will make something of all this?" Sirius walked over to them.

"He can try, but 23 Aurors all agree you did good" She looked up the street "And speaking of the interfering old man..." All three of them turned to see Dumbledore striding down the street towards them. Finch turned to her two charges "Go. I will take care of him"

"You sure?"

"Yes - go"

"Thank you" Sirius took Susan's hand, then they both vanished as their portkey activated. A moment later they re-appeared in Susan's living room, and at once were drowned in hugs from three worried children.

"Where is Mr Whiteheart?"

"He and Mrs Perks had to leave, sir" Auror Finch smiled at Dumbledore "They had to go check on the kids"

"Can you tell me what happened here, Auror?"

"Five men in dark robes and white masks - somewhat similar to Death Eaters - attacked the Alley, lead by a man who appeared to be Sirius Black"

"And was Mr Potter here?"

"I can't answer that, sir"

"Pardon me?"

"We are not permitted to discuss the behaviour or activities of our charges, sir, and if I were to betray the confidence of those who I am protecting, sir, then they wouldn't trust me in the future, and I would not be able to do my job, sir" She smiled politely "I am sure you understand, sir"

"Can you at least tell me if he was hurt or not?"

"I can't comment, sir" She shrugged in apology. Dumbledore stared at her for a moment, then nodded.

"I understand. I am sorry for pressing you on this issue, Auror Finch" He bowed "I will read the report when Director Bones is finished with it" He turned, and walked back up the Alley. When Harry returned to school, he would get the truth out of him.

"Could we have done anything differently?" Susan asked.

"No" Sirius leaned back "We got Harry, Sal and Min to safety as soon as we could, and we helped the Aurors defend the Alley" He smirked "And Min got a replacement for Pixie" He looked over at the kitten, now resting in a basket by the washing machine "Did she say why she picked that one?"

"Apparently she thought the... how did she put it?"

"Giant red-fluff monster of death"

"That's it. Apparently she thought that might eat the Weasley's rat" Susan couldn't help smirking at the thought "She decided that that would not help the situation with Ginny"

"True" He looked down at the kitten again "What name did she decide on?"

"Alyssaria"

The next day, the three students, plus Aly, returned to school, and, as they entered the common room, they found a group of students gathered around the noticeboard.

"A dance?" Harry asked "I thought that idea left with Lockheart"

"Is this your way of saying you don't want to go?" Sally asked him.

"Well - we went last year, and Min almost got killed by a giant snake, so I was a little worried by what might happen if we go this year" Sally laughed, then looked around.

"Shall we go?"

Harry and Sally watched as Hermione tapped her wand against the beacon on the floor, then they held their breath as she took on the blank look of someone projecting themselves in to the astral plane.

A moment later, they both smiled as the figure of Sirius appeared next to Hermione.

"Hello Uncle Mike" Harry beamed "Welcome to The Chamber of Secrets"

Chapter 10

She walked down the passage towards the portrait hole. She had spent the past six weeks dropping subtle hints about the Valentine's Day dance, but her beloved hadn't shown any interest. It started in two hours, and she had realised she had to force the issue.

She pushed the portrait open, and saw him sat by the fire, staring in to the flames.

"Hey sweetie" She plumped down next to him, and took his hand.

"Sweetie?" He smiled "What happened to honey?" She stared at him for a moment, then shrugged.

"So - I was wondering about the dance" She smiled "I know you said you didn't want to go, but... well I thought it might make you feel a little better, after... everything" She stroked his arm. He turned and looked at her.

"Why now?" He leaned over and kissed her cheek "You haven't mentioned it in days"

"I know you were down after your last fight with Dumbledore, and... if I ask you tomorrow, it would be too late" He smiled, then looked up as the portrait hole opened again.

"So... that's why you don't like divination?"

"Yeah. I know it is a little dumb, but..." Hermione trailed off as she saw Harry sat by the fire, holding hands with...

"Harry?"

Harry stood up, letting go of the hand he had been holding tightly a moment before.

"Sal?" His girlfriend stared back at him from across the common room, then, after a moment, they both turned and stared at the girl sat by the fire.

"Okay - which of you is the real Sally?" He asked, although he was sure he knew the answer already.

"Harry!" The girl by the fireplace jumped to her feet "How can you not know me?" She walked up to him, then leaned over to kiss him. He looked across at the Sally stood next to Hermione, then held out his arms to stop the Sally in front of him finishing the kiss.

"I wondered why you would be so eager to go to the dance all of a sudden" He said softly, then turned and smiled at the girl next to Hermione "My lady"

"How did you know?" She asked, walking over and taking his hand.

"You have enough faith in us to let me kiss someone else" He smiled, then his smile faded as he turned back to the other girl "And you seem just a little too clingy" He frowned "Who are you?" For a moment, the face of his girlfriend stared back at him, then she pulled out her wand.

"OBSCURUM TOTALUM!"

The common room filled with a thick, black smoke, and by the time it has cleared, there was only one Sally left in the room.

"Sal?"

"Richard?"

"Summer!" He hugged her tightly, then they both turned to Hermione "Where did she go?"

"I think she went out through the portrait hole" Hermione gestured "Who do you think it was?" They both stared at her "Yeah - silly question really"

"A better one is - what do we do about it?" Sally asked "If we tell Professor McGonagall, will she bother doing anything?"

"You think she won't?" Sally asked in surprise.

"She will listen" Harry sighed "But then she will talk to the Headmaster, and he will tell her to ignore it" He smirked at the look of disbelief on the two faces in front of him "He thinks Ginny and I

would be the perfect couple, and is hell-bent on remaking my world so that it will come to pass"

"I still think we should tell McGonagall" Hermione said stubbornly, and, after a moment, Harry nodded.

"Albus, I received a very strange report from some students in my house today"

"Indeed?"

"Miss Perks, Mr Potter and Miss Granger told me about someone pretending to be Miss Perks in order to seduce Mr Potter in to taking her to the dance"

"Did it work?" The Headmaster asked.

"No - the three of them confronted... whoever this person was and made her leave"

"Her?"

"Miss Granger believed, and was very sure in her belief, that it was young Miss Weasley, under the affects of polyjuice potion"

"Really?" Dumbledore smiled in amusement.

"Why is is this so amusing?"

"Oh - no real reason. I just find it amusing that Miss Perks and Miss Granger are convinced that Miss Weasley is the source of all evil"

"So you don't think we should take this seriously?"

"Well - even assuming that they didn't make the story up, just to try to get Miss Weasley in to trouble, I am sure it was just a Valentine's Day prank. Simple hijinks that didn't really hurt anyone. I wouldn't give it another thought"

"And if Miss Granger presses me about it?"

"Tell her that they should learn to take a joke. Or at least accept that Miss Weasley is not cause of all the problems in their lives"

"OWWW!"

"Oh my!!"

"My arm!! Look what the bloody plant did to my ruddy arm!!!"

"Maybe you should go to the hospital wing and get it seen to?"

"You think?"

"What is up with him?" Sally asked as the three friends walked in to the great hall for the evening meal. At the Gryffindor table, Ron was waving his arms around dramatically, and glowering at everyone.

They watched him for a moment, then took their seats at the far end of the table, putting as much distance between them and Ginny as they could.

Harry hadn't been surprised when no investigation had been carried out, even though Hermione had threatened to go to the governors.

"Let it go" He had told her "And remember - we aren't kids at the disco any more" She had looked at him curiously "We can get revenge like true Slytherins now"

After they had sat down, Sally had looked back down the table at Ron, then turned to the student next to her.

"What's with him?"

"Figures you wouldn't know" The sixth year girl sneered at her "But Georgia was hurt in Herbology, and won't be fit for Saturday"

"So play the reserve" Sally replied, then her mouth fell open in surprise "Wood doesn't have a reserve?"

"We never needed one" Came Wood's voice from a little way up the table. Then he stood up, and walked down to where they were sat "And I don't appreciate being told how to run my team by you"

"Pardon me?" Sally stared at him.

"I know who you are, Perks, and I don't need a Hufflepuff quisling ruining my game" He glared at her, then looked surprised when she burst in to laughter.

"I am really don't think I could make your game any worse than it is, Wood"

"You think you could do better?" He sneered at her with contempt dripping from every word "Or are you just going to sit on the sidelines and mock?" Sally looked at Harry and Hermione, but when they both nodded, she shook her head.

"Sorry. I apologise. I am sure you will turn this year around, and do it without my pitiful help"

"I thought so" Wood turned to the girl next to him, and Sally, after a last glare, stood up and stormed out of the hall. Harry gave a nasty glare at Wood, then stood up and followed her out. Hermione watched them go, then turned back to Wood "What?" He asked.

"You really have no idea who she is, or what you just did to your championship hopes, do you?" She asked softly.

"An ex-Hufflepuff who is too full of herself"

"I assume that, even though you haven't won anything in there, you know where the trophy room is?"

"Of course"

"When you get a moment, you should go look in it" She gave him a final smirk, then stood up "It might open your eyes about... Hufflepuff quislings. And their fathers"

"What did you do?" Sally asked as Hermione sat down next to them in the common room.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked, eyes wide with innocence.

"You saw me get pulled out of Charms?"

"Yes"

"Wood ambushed me, and asked me all about my father, and about what position I play" She frowned "And then he asked me - literally begged me - to play against Ravenclaw"

"Oh" Hermione shrugged "After this morning, I just wanted to shut them up, so..." She sighed "It seemed like a good idea at the time" Sally glared at her, then smiled.

"Do you think I should play?" She asked.

"It will show them what you can do" Harry said.

"It could be fun" Hermione added.

"It would shut them up"

"It would be a good way to remember your dad"

"But only if you want to" Harry finished.

She stared in to the fire for a few minutes, but then nodded. Harry and Hermione cheered, then stopped when she held a hand up.

"Two conditions. First - this is the only game I will play, at least for now, and secondly - you will both owe me a favour to be to be defined at a later date" They both nodded. She took a deep breath, then stood up and walked over to where Wood and the rest of the team were sat "Here's the deal - I will play in the Ravenclaw game, as seeker, but that's all. Hagan will be fit for the last game, and I won't be needed"

"A lot of people would give their right arm to be on this team, Perks" Wood glared at her.

"Well I need my right arm" Sally couldn't help smirking "How else will I hold the snitch aloft?"

"Welcome to the third match of the year, between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw. The Claws come in to the match in a commanding first place, with a hundred and seventy point lead over the third place Lions. And Wood is counting on a substitute seeker to reverse the recent terrible form of his team - he has replaced the injured Hagan with Sally-Ann Perks, late of Hufflepuff, and - if my sources are

correct, daughter of the late and truly great Daniel Perks - one of the best seekers of recent times"

Harry and Hermione watched as the teams flew out, and they cheered loudly as Sally's name was announced. She waved back, then flew over to join the rest of the team.

"And, as Madam Hooch gets the game underway, Katie Bell grabs the quaffle. But... Perks is charging down the field towards the Ravenclaw keeper... it looks like they are going to crash in to each other, but..." There was a huge cheer from the Gryffindor end "Perks rolls left as Trask ducks out of the way, and Bell shoots in to an open hoop!!"

The game went on, and it seemed that Sally had every intention of displaying the full range of what a seeker should be able to do. Harry glanced across at Ron, and laughed at the expression of rapture on the red-head's face.

"Getting tired, Perks?" Cho Chang had been looking forward to the game since their easy victory over Hufflepuff, and - with Hagan's reputation - had expected it to be just as easy.

But now, barely half an hour in, Ravenclaw were sixty points down, and Gryffindor's new seeker was making her look like a complete fool. For three years she had been known as one of the best, and now Perks was running rings round her - on her DEBUT no less!

"Just getting started Chang" Perks gave a smirk, then laughed "Hey - you ever hear of a guy named Josef Wronski?"

"Who's that? Another Hufflepuff traitor?" Sally gaped at her, then laughed again.

"No" She suddenly turned her head, then shot off at full speed. She heard Chang give a squeak, and then saw the older girl follow her.

"And with the score at 90-40 to Gryffindor, Sally seems to have spotted the snitch, and is racing down the pitch with Chang barely keeping up... could this be it?" There was a pause "No! Sally pulls

up less than a foot from the ground, and Cho Chang..." There was a crash, followed by a thud "...doesn't. A perfect Wronski feint from the Gryffindor debutante leaves the Ravenclaw seeker flat on her back" There was a burst of cheers and applause from the Gryffindor end, while the other three houses were less appreciative of Sally's trick "But now it appears that Sally has seen the snitch. She is going full tilt... it looks like she means business!!" There was a brief burst of cheers from the Ravenclaws as Cho Chang got back on her broom, but it was muted as Sally reached out and grabbed the snitch out of the air. Then, with a small smile, she turned to Wood, and held it up for him to see.

"AND GRYFFINDOR WIN THE MATCH BY 240 POINTS TO 50!!!!"
Lee announced at the top his voice "And Sally-Ann Perks catches the snitch in her first and last match for The Lions"

For a moment there was absolute silence at this announcement, as everyone stared at Sally, who was gently gliding to the ground, still holding the fluttering golden ball. Then it seemed that the entire crowd exploded in to noise as a tide of boos swept over the stadium.

When she landed, Sally looked around, then climbed back on her broom and shot off towards the castle. Harry and Hermione watched her go, then stood up and pushed their way out. As they went past Ron and Percy, the youngest Weasley boy sneered at them.

"She'd better play against Hufflepuff, or else!"

"She's never going to forgive me, is she?" Harry sighed as they ran up to the castle.

"Of course she is" Hermione replied "Just not right away"

"Myrtle - is she in The Chamber?"

"Yes - but she said she wanted to be alone" The girl floated back and forth in front of them "Did you upset her?"

"Kind of" Harry sighed "I came to say sorry, and make it up to her"
He turned, and walked towards the entrance to The Chamber, then

stopped and looked back "How did she get in?" Myrtle stared at him, then giggled.

"I'll let her tell you that"

"Sally? Are you down here?"

"No" The voice came from the far end of The Chamber, and Harry and Hermione walked down the central path towards the statue of Salazar Slytherin "What part of 'no' did you not understand?"

"We came to say we were sorry, and that we shouldn't have railroaded you into it" Harry knelt down next to the chair she was in "I know it doesn't help, but we did mean well" They both stared at her as she continued to stare at the wall. After a few minutes, she turned to them, and smiled.

"I am not mad at either of you" She stood up, then hugged each of them in turn "But being booed by an entire school... I just needed to get out of there" She leaned against Harry and sighed "I knew that something like this would happen, which is why I didn't want to play" She smiled at the looks on their faces "Seriously - I don't blame you, guys. I decided to play, against my own better judgment, and I have no one to blame but myself" Then she gave a sly smile "Besides - I have already decided how you can pay me back" Harry saw the look on her face, and turned to Hermione.

"Why am I suddenly very scared?"

"Because your girlfriend is one of us, and therefore very sneaky" Hermione smiled as Sally rubbed her hands together and cackled insanely. After a few moments she stopped, then shrugged.

"Everyone should cackle insanely now and then" She waved them to sit down, then pulled out a piece of parchment "This is what you can do for me"

She handed it to Hermione, who read it, groaned, and handed it to Harry. He skimmed over it, then looked up at Sally.

"I know that neither of you like divination all that much, but since Voldemort told us about The Prophecy about you and him, I have been reading up on similar ones in the past"

"Are you thinking of taking it?" He asked.

"Maybe. But since Professor Trelawney is holding this seminar, I thought I would attend, and see if it is worth the effort of taking it"

"And you want us to come along because..." Hermione asked.

"Because you both promised you would, and because I do think you both owe me after today" She held up her hand when they both spoke at once "I don't blame you, and I promise this isn't punishment, and that it ends here" She smiled at them "So - do you think we should get back?"

"Nah - we have time" Harry replied, then his face lit up "I knew there was something I had to ask you - how did you get down here?"

"Sorry?"

"The entrance only opens to parselmouths - and unless you have been holding out on us, you shouldn't have been able to get in"

"Oh" She considered his words for a moment "I don't know how I got in. The entrances opened up for me when I approached them, but I didn't notice it because I was so mad" She paused "Maybe Hogwarts helped me"

"Hogwarts?" Hermione turned to her "The castle?"

"Haven't you noticed some of the odd things going on?" They both stared at her "We have never been caught coming into or out of The Chamber, even after setting off the beacon Uncle Mike gave us, and we know the name of The Sorting Hat" She sighed "Maybe it's all a big co-incidence, but it just made me wonder" She looked at her watch "We really should be getting back"

Chapter 11

A month later, three teachers met in a deserted classroom.

"Albus - we have to do something"

"What can we do Minerva?"

"Hush Severus - I know you are not a fan of Mr Potter, but his role in the future can not be denied"

"And it is a role he is unlikely to take in his current position"

"So what do you suggest, Minerva?"

"If Miss Perks had remained a Hufflepuff, I believe that their friendship would have come to an end"

"You don't think we can move her again?"

"No - she would not ask to be resorted, and Mr Potter has taught her enough Occlumency to prevent me modifying her mind"

"I know. But given what happened at the match, I think we can isolate her within her house, while giving Harry other possibilities"

"I would have thought that after the Valentine's debacle, Mr Potter and his little friends would be more suspicious of the Weasley girl than ever"

"Now now, Severus - that was only a minor setback. And while we are all sorry your Polyjuice plan did not go off as intended, the three of them can not be sure that it was Miss Weasley. I believe, Minerva, that your plan has the best chance of success" There was a pause "I also have a plan, but it will not be of use until next year"

"Why is that, Headmaster?"

"Because the Wizengamot would not consider acting in regard to the future of an Heir to the Seven Houses while the said heir is so young"

The three professors left the classroom, but didn't notice the slight disturbance in the air as they walked through the corridor, nor did they notice when it vanished.

"Wow" Hermione said to herself, then shook her head "I think they need to hear this too"

"I admit the Wizengamot thing is scary, but the rest? It's nothing we didn't already know" Harry said as they walked towards the Great Hall.

"Aren't you worried about the isolation thing?" Sally asked, glancing at Hermione to get her reaction as well.

"Honestly? No" He took Sally's left hand and Hermione's right "I am not going to let either of you go, even if the whole school turns against us"

"Same goes for me" Hermione added.

"So - why don't you like divination?" Harry asked Hermione. Sally smirked, then - when Harry looked at her questioningly, she nodded towards Hermione.

"It's a novel reason, to say the least" They both turned and looked at their friend, who blushed slightly.

"Part of me thinks it's hogwash - that at best a prophecy is a guess, that when it happens is declared as perfect, and when it fails is re-interpreted until it comes true"

"And the other part?"

"I can't remember - did I ever lend you a book called 'Soothsayer'?"

"I don't think so... hold on" He was lost in a memory for a moment "The book about Penelope..."

"Bailey. That's the one" Harry stared at her, then nodded in understanding.

"You think that someone could be a Penny?" He asked.

"I don't know" She shrugged "But you have to admit, it's a scary thought" Harry considered this for a moment, then smiled.

"So - the reason you don't like divination is because you think it's utter rubbish, and because you are scared it might not be?" Hermione blushed again, but nodded.

When they reached the doors to the hall, Sally pulled them to a stop.

"I know I asked you to do this, but if you want to back out..."

"No"

"No"

"Okay"

"Welcome to Divination" Professor Trelawney said, from the front of the Great Hall "Over the next hour, we will explore together the ways that one can peer in to the future, and perhaps, see what will be and what will not be"

Harry rolled his eyes at the overly melodramatic performance, and Sally slapped his arm and glared at him.

"And so - let us now begin our journey"

An hour later, the students started to file out of the hall, while Sally remained seated. Harry and Hermione stared at her, then sat back down, and waited with her.

"So - what do you think?" Harry asked Hermione "Are you going to take it next year?"

"No" She shook her head "It still seems like a very woolly branch of magic, and I don't think I would be suited for it" She looked around, then caught sight of the retreating figure of Luna Lovegood "Now she" She gestured towards the second year girl "Would be suited for it"

"You think?"

"Yup" They were distracted by Sally standing up, and walking to the front of the hall. They followed her, and a moment later, were all stood in front of the Divination teacher.

"Professor Trelawney?" Sally got her attention.

"Yes, my dears?"

"You mentioned prophecies in your talk, and I was wondering - is there a record of them?"

"Why would you want to know that, my dear?"

"Well - I was wondering... if someone knew that a prophecy existed, but not the exact details, would they be able to find the full text?"

"Ahh - I see" Professor Trelawney looked thoughtful "There is a room in The Ministry that contains a record of all the prophecies that are known, but no one aside from The Guardians are permitted to enter"

"So there would be no way for anyone else to get it?"

"No - only The Guardians, and those who are mentioned in, or heard, the original prophecy"

"Cool" Sally murmured to herself "Thank you Professor"

"You are welcome my dear" Trelawney turned, then turned back "I have an opening in my class, my dear, and could give you material to catch you up over the summer"

"Thank you Professor" Sally replied "I will consider your offer, and let you know by the end of the year" The three turned to go, but stopped when a deep voice filled the hall.

"42 DAYS" Trelawney was staring into space "THERE ARE BUT 42 DAYS UNTIL THE SERVANT, CHAINED THESE 13 YEARS, WILL RETURN TO HIS DARK MASTER. ON THAT NIGHT, JUSTICE AND VENGEANCE WILL BE ONE, AND OLD AND NEW FRIENDS WILL UNITE TO FIGHT THE DARK"

There was a moment of absolute silence, then the divination teacher looked over at them.

"Was there something else, my dears?"

"No, thank you Professor" Hermione pulled them away, and out in to the corridor.

"What the hell was that?" Harry asked, as they walked back to the common room. Sally shrugged, but then they came to a halt as Hermione ducked in to an alcove, and pulled them in after her.

"Min?" Sally said softly, but stopped when Hermione held up her hand. They watched her write for a few minutes, then she put the quill down, and handed them what she had written.

"Is that what she said?" She asked, then smiled when the other two nodded "Good" She took a breath "I think that, as much as I hate to admit this, Professor Trelawney is a true seer, and this" She gestured to the parchment "Is real"

"Wow" Harry said "So - should we tell someone?"

"Who would we tell?" Hermione asked in response "And - if this is real - what can they do to stop it?"

"So we just sit and wait for the next six weeks?" Harry frowned "We do nothing?"

"No" Hermione shook her head "I suggest we tell our parents, and maybe Professor Lupin"

"You don't think he will tell Dumbledore?"

"Maybe, maybe not" She shrugged "But if the end of this is right - about old and new friends uniting - then he seems the most likely candidate"

"And the servant?" Sally asked, but neither of them had an answer for that.

"I think this will be our last lesson" Remus said to the three students "You all appear to have mastered the charm - something that you should all be very proud of, by the way, and there isn't much more I can teach you in regard to it"

"Thank you professor" Harry smiled "We are all very grateful for everything you have done"

"It has been a pleasure - getting to know you three has certainly made this year a lot more entertaining" He smiled at each of them
"But now I think you should go and rest, so that Sally can be ready for her quidditch practice"

"Pardon me?" All three of the students asked in surprised unison.

"Professor McGonagall said that you played brilliantly in your game against Ravenclaw, and that Gryffindor might actually win the cup this year" He looked at them "I am obviously missing something?"

"Did you see the last game?" Harry asked, taking Sally's hand.

"It was the day after the full moon, so..."

"So you didn't hear how the match ended?"

"Sally caught..."

"Not that part!" Harry snapped at him "The part where the entire student body booed my girlfriend off the pitch, and the part where the whole of the house she won the match for spent the next month shunning and insulting her" Remus stared at them.

"I agreed to play one game" Sally said calmly "And only because they would forfeit if I didn't"

"But if you play..."

"Why should she?" Hermione yelled, causing Remus to take a step back in shock "Sorry. But seriously - ever since Sally joined Gryffindor, the House has shunned her. Ginny Weasley has been trying to be nice, but that is because she wants Harry, and figures it will be easier stab Sally in the back when they are friends" Harry and Sally smirked "And last year, Sal offered to try out, but was told that the team didn't need traitors"

"I was put in Gryffindor after Hufflepuff - the loyalest house - abandoned me" Sally sighed "The Lions don't want me, and haven't wanted me since day one, so why should I go out of my way to win glory for a house that despises me?" Remus stared at them, then shrugged.

"I can see your point. So - you won't play"

"No, sir, I won't"

"Miss Perks - please come to my office after dinner" McGonagall called out from the staff table. As everyone turned to stare at her, Sally dropped her head in to her hands.

"So - she knows you missed practice then" Hermione stated.

"I'm guessing"

"What do you think?" Harry asked "Can they expel you over this?"

"No, but my best guess is that your next visit to Hogsmeade will be with Minnie, not me, and that you might not be seeing me around the common room some nights" She sighed in frustration "Do you think we could form our own house? Just the three of us?"

"Sounds fun" Hermione smiled "So - practice tonight?"

"I think we should stop for a while" Harry said "If McGonagall is paying attention to us, then anything unusual we do might get noticed as well" Sally nodded, then stood up.

"Might as well get this over with"

"She told me it was my duty to my House to play, and that she is willing to give me twenty four hours to consider what will happen if I fail in my duty"

"So?"

"So she and I will meet again tomorrow. She will give me detention, I will refuse to play. She will ban me from Hogsmeade for the year, and I will still refuse to play. The Headmaster's plan to break you and me up, and push you in to the loving arms of the wacky Slytherin will, in their eyes at least, take another giant step forward" She smiled "You know - when my mother told me I would get a good education at Hogwarts, I am pretty sure this wasn't what she had in mind"

The silence in the common room was deafening as Sally came through the portrait hole. She looked around, then shrugged, and walked off to her dorm room. She was joined by Harry and Hermione, who sat down on her bed.

"Bad?"

"Yup"

"Worse than we expected?"

"Not really. She yelled, I refused, she gave me detention, I refused, she banned me from Hogsmeade for the year, I refused, she turned in to a giant spider and bit my head off, I refused..."

"We get the picture"

"I take it the rest of the House knows?"

"Ron and Ginny haven't felt the need to keep the dispute quiet, and they have been all too eager to assign blame" Hermione said with a glare at the door "Their brothers are following their lead, and as go the Weasleys, so goes..."

"Okay" Sally smiled "So the first step is revenge against those two, then..."

"I think that's enough to be going on with for the moment"

"And the next to last game of the year ends with Chang taking the snitch, which is just enough to spare the blushes of the rest of her team, but not enough to give them first place. They trail Slytherin by twenty points, but now both teams must wait until tomorrow for their fate, when Gryffindor take on Hufflepuff, needing only a win to take the cup" Lee paused "So the burden will be on the recently returned Hagan to end the game as quickly as she can"

The Ravenclaw team flew off the pitch dejectedly, glaring at the Gryffindors as they went past. The Slytherins, by comparison, were celebrating their defeat, flying in impressive swoops and dives.

Sally, Harry and Hermione set off back to the castle, and were joined along the way by Professor Lupin.

"Good game" He remarked.

"Chang has got better - she almost looked like she knew what she was doing out there" Sally smirked.

"So - you are still going to let Hagan play tomorrow?"

"She is the team seeker, not me" Sally looked up at her teacher "They only need to win by one goal, and Bell, Johnson and Spinnet should be able to manage that, even if Hagan can't find the snitch with both her hands and flashlight"

"Well - I understand your reasons, but you must know what will happen if Hufflepuff aren't beaten tomorrow" Remus looked down at her fondly "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"Win, lose or draw, it will be over" Sally smiled "Then I can go back to being hated for being a Hufflepuff traitor, as opposed to Gryffindor traitor" She sighed "At least until the start of next season"

"Welcome to the last match of the year. Hufflepuff are playing to avoid a whitewash, but they will have to beat Gryffindor to do it. Meanwhile Gryffindor are playing for a chance to win The Cup - the first real chance we have had in a decades, and a win by just one goal will do it" There were bursts of cheers and boos across the stadium, then he continued "Of course, with certain players refusing to take the field, no one is going to blame The Lions if they don't win today"

"Perfect" Sally moaned. The three of them were sat in the common room, listening to the commentary Lee Jordan was going. After an exceedingly frosty reception at breakfast, they had decided that going to the game itself could lead to problems.

"If they win, it will be despite your refusal, but if they don't..."

"It will be because of it" She finished Harry's sentence.

"Any ideas what we are going to do to Ron and Ginny?" Hermione asked "Because, whatever the outcome of today, they are not going to stop"

"And Bell scores!! Gryffindor take the lead 30 to 0"

"Well - we could use some of their brothers' pranks against them" Harry suggested.

"Won't that just get us in to more trouble?"

"80-0 to Gryffindor!!"

"Hold on!" Hermione bounced to her feet "We can appear as each other, so why can't we..." She closed her eyes, and a moment later, Ginny Weasley appeared next to them.

"So - who would be the best choice to get Ginny in to trouble?" The image of Ginny asked.

"Gryffindor lead by 110 points!" They all turned to the voice coming through the window.

"The Girls are doing well today" Harry remarked, then closed his eyes. A moment later, Ron faded in to existence next to his sister
"So - what can we do?"

"I think we should at least wait until later" Ginny said "I expect everyone who is at the match can see them... us? Including the staff" She smirked "Maybe tonight, after everyone's in bed?"

"The lead increases to 140, and the Hufflepuff Chasers are unable to make an impact on the game, as Wood - in his final appearance for Gryffindor, plays one of his best games ever!" As Ron and Ginny faded out, Hermione opened her eyes again.

"Once everyone is in bed, we can send Ron and Ginny out. The Aurors and prefects will be patrolling the castle, and I think, with our combined skills, we should be able to ensure that the two red-heads are seen, but not caught"

"And with the lead at 150 points, Bell charges down the pitch. She passes to Johnson, who passes to Bell, to Spinnet, back to Bell... but Bell stops, and looks round..." There was a second of silence,

then cheers erupted from the stadium, along with a huge chorus of boos.

"What do you think?" Harry asked, but before anyone could respond, Lee's voice came over the megaphone again.

"Diggory catches the snitch, and, despite Wood's clean sheet, the game ends in a tie" The cheers redoubled "And after the Perks Demolition of Ravenclaw, the tied match hands The Cup to Slytherin, by a mere two goals"

Sally burst out laughing, and turned to Harry, who was looking at her as if she was crazy.

"You don't remember?" She asked, still smiling.

"What?"

"Ron came to yell at you, because you told Malfoy you were scared of Sirius"

"Yes..." Harry trailed off, then his eyes lit up and he started laughing as well.

"Guys?" Hermione stared at them. They turned, and both got themselves under control "What am I missing?"

"Harry asked me how Ravenclaw..."

"Was the only House we hadn't pissed off, given that most of the rest of the school despises us" Hermione finished "So now we have the set!" She joined in the laughter, but they all quietened down when the portrait hole opened.

"Good game?" Hermione asked, trying to keep her face straight. The incoming students glared at her, and she had to turn her back on them as she fought to get herself under control again. Sally glanced across at her, then she and Harry grabbed an arm each, and carried her out of the common room and down towards an empty classroom.

"I'm sorry" Hermione smirked "I couldn't help myself"

"Don't worry about it" Sally giggled "I was on the verge of cracking up too" She sat down "Tonight?"

"Tonight"

"RONALD WEASLEY! GINEVRA WEASLEY!" Professor McGonagall stormed in to the Great Hall the following morning, and up to the two students she had yelled at. They both jumped to their feet and turned to face her.

"Yes, Professor?"

"DETENTION for both of you, EVERY night this week, and FIFTY POINTS EACH from Gryffindor for your appalling and idiotic behaviour!! I have NEVER in my life seen such reckless stupidity, especially in a time like this. You are lucky I don't expel you both, but believe me I WILL be telling your mother about this!! Risking your lives for the sake of a PRANK? What were you THINKING?!" She turned and stalked away, leaving the two siblings staring at her retreating form in utter confusion.

At the other end of the table, three students smiled at each other for a job well done.

Chapter 12

Mr Potter - what are you still doing here?" Professor McGonagall asked "I would have expected you and Miss Granger to be waiting by the carriages"

"We aren't going to Hogsmeade" Hermione replied.

"We are going to stay and revise with Sally, Professor" Harry added.

"This is the last Hogsmeade weekend of the year - don't you want to spend it in the village?"

"You are encouraging me to leave the castle?" Harry asked in surprise "It wasn't too long ago that neither you nor the Headmaster were virtually ordering me to stay in the grounds. And that was before the attacks by Black" McGonagall stared at him, then turned and stalked away. Harry watched her go, then turned to Hermione "Is it wrong that that was kind of fun?"

"Do you really want to revise?"

"I kind of just said that to get her off our backs"

"But the exams are in three weeks" Hermione exclaimed "Come on!" Harry stared at her for a moment, then shrugged, and followed her back to the common room. When they were halfway there, a thought occurred to him.

"Do you think if we projected Ginny to Hogsmeade we could get her in a lot more trouble than usual?" Hermione stared at him for a moment, then shook her head.

"Best not" She sighed "Someone might notice"

"Is it me, or do the exams seem to be easier this year?" It was the last day of exam week for the third years, and they were waiting outside the DaDa classroom for Professor Lupin's exam. Hermione glanced across at Sally, then smiled.

"No - it's not just you" She replied, then glanced around at the rest of the class "Of course - when no one is talking to you, you get a lot more time for revision"

In the months since Slytherin had won the cup, the entire House had been ignoring them completely. Ginny had been semi-friendly for the first two weeks, but then she had suggested that he could spend the summer at The Burrow, and that as they were both, nominally, heirs to the Seven Houses, they would make a very good and powerful match.

Unfortunately, she had said this within earshot of Sally and Hermione. And even though Harry hadn't shown any sign of listening, or any sign of interest at all, both girls had decided enough was enough.

The next night, Ginny had been seen out of bed, painting "SLYTHERINS SUCK" on walls throughout the castle.

The next morning - after McGonagall had given her two weeks detention - Sally had asked her if a vandal, even one who was heir to one of the Seven Houses, was a suitable consort for anyone.

Ginny hadn't spoken to them since then, but the rumours about Harry and Sally splitting up increased in number dramatically.

"So - last exam" Harry looked at the door, but there was still no sign of Lupin.

"What do you think he is going to give us?" Hermione asked "I think the practical is going to be fun!"

"Fun?" Hannah Abbot turned and stared at her "Figures you would find this fun" Hermione turned to ask her what she meant, but the door opened, and Professor Snape came out of the classroom. As he passed the students, he turned round to face Lupin, who was now stood in the doorway.

"Remember what I said, Lupin" He snarled "This can't go on forever"

"I understand, Professor Snape, but I believe you are worrying over nothing" Lupin surveyed the students "But perhaps we can discuss this later"

"If you don't listen, there won't be a later"

"Severus..." Lupin said in a warning tone.

"Mark my words, Lupin, if this isn't stopped then there will be hell to pay" Snape whirled round, cape billowing, and stalked off down the corridor. For a moment everyone stared after him, then turned and looked questioningly at Professor Lupin. He shrugged.

"Professor Snape and I disagree on a number of topics - some more serious than others" He stood to one side and ushered everyone in to the class.

"Wow - that was actually a lot of fun" Harry said as they walked back to the common room. Lupin had provided a very entertaining obstacle course, and both Sally and Hermione were very amused at Lupin's reaction to Harry's boggart. When the professor had first seen Dumbledore appear, he had been stunned into silence. But the second time, when Harry had confronted the boggart at the end of the course, Lupin had simply smiled, and nodded in understanding.

"Do you think Lupin's coming around?" Sally asked "He seems to be far less trusting of Dumbledore, and far more friendly to Uncle Mike than he was at the start of term"

"Maybe" Hermione looked around "But I don't think we should..."

"Oh. No" Sally shook her head "That's not what I meant" She smiled at the look of relief on Hermione's face "So - two days?"

"Yeah" Harry said from behind them "I take it you haven't worked it out yet?"

"Well - not the details, but I think that, come the next full moon, someone from the school is going to defect, and join Voldemort - wherever he is at the moment"

"And the justice and vengeance part?"

"No idea" Hermione said abruptly, but at the same time she signed 'Not here' Harry nodded, and they all turned away from the common room, and towards Myrtle's bathroom.

"Tonight, Severus"

"No - there is too much attention"

"Then when would you suggest?"

"Two nights. We can use the same disposal method Black was going to use on me"

"Very well. I will return then"

"So - what do you think?" Harry asked. He and the two girls were sat in Myrtle's bathroom, with the door locked and the room silenced.

"I have been thinking a lot about Vanessa's song. Aside from bitching about Dumbledore, she also mentioned three friends returning to Hogwarts, and learning secrets"

"And five lions making a choice" Sally added "I think we are three of them"

"Uncle Mike?"

"And Remus?" Harry stared at the two girls as they conversed.

"And the justice and vengeance?" Sally asked, then snapped her fingers "That's why you wanted to talk here!" She noticed Harry staring at them in confusion "Maybe Uncle Mike will be vindicated, and he can get his own life back!"

Harry stared at them thoughtfully, then shook his head.

"The only way for that to happen would be if we could hand Pettigrew over to Minister Fudge" There was a short period of silence, then he continued "What did she mean by 'Crossing The Bridge'?"

"Old wizarding term" Hermione replied "It refers to the first time someone takes a life"

"So we might have to kill someone?" Sally asked in surprise.

"I think we have the choice" Hermione frowned "To kill, or let..." She trailed off.

"Or let what?"

"If the servant is returning to his master, then it's a good bet it will make things worse - and that Voldemort might step things up"

"Yes. So?"

"To cross the bridge, or let evil wake" She shook her head, trying to deny what she had worked out "We either kill him, or be the cause of Voldemort's return" After a few minutes of Silence, Harry expressed what they were all thinking.

"Well... that sucks"

"CRUCIO!!"

"Sally!!

NO!!!"

"RUN!!"

"But they aren't, are they?"

"Sir... what the hell?"

"It's up to you"

"Do we tell him the truth?"

"The moon!!!"

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!!!!"

"HARRY!" Harry sat bolt upright in bed at the sound of his name. He looked around in utter confusion as he realised that he had actually woken up in The Chamber of Secrets. Then he saw Sally and Hermione stood over him, and his confusion deepened.

"You are still dreaming" His girlfriend said with a smile, sitting down next to him, taking his hand.

"Again?" He asked softly, and the two girls nodded "I can't remember the details, but Sally was being tortured..."

"...and we were surrounded by dementors..."

"...and we turned someone over to be... to be executed" Harry finished.

"Or murdered" Hermione replied, then shook her head "We can deconstruct this tomorrow - we should get some sleep"

"Aren't we already asleep?" Harry tried to smile, but the image of Sally writhing in pain wouldn't leave him. He reached out and hugged her, then together they lay down on the floor. Hermione watched them for a moment, then smiled softly, and lay down a few feet away from them.

"Professor Lupin?"

"Yes Harry?"

"What does Crucio mean?" Harry took a step back as Lupin whirled round with a horrified look on his face.

"Where did you hear that? Did someone use it on you? Are you alright?"

"Woah!" Harry put a hand on Lupin's arm "I dreamed about it - someone was using it on Sally" He saw Lupin heave a visible sigh of relief.

"Well then - I will tell you, but you have to promise you will never try to learn it, and that you will never, ever use it on another living being"

"I promise" Harry replied "But, if I am being honest, I can only promise to try not to" Lupin stared at him, then nodded.

"The cruciatus curse, along with the imperius and killing curses, are the three most wicked curses in the wizarding world. The cruciatus curse subjects the victim to intense torture - far worse than anything you can imagine. Thankfully, I have never felt it, but I have been told it feels like your skin is being ripped off by fire, from inside your body" He shuddered.

"However the worst part is that it does no physical damage, so it can be used over and over again, until the victim is driven out of their mind" He looked down at Harry "It is also reputed to damage the caster in some way, thought exactly how is not clear"

Harry stared at him, thinking about Sally. He couldn't wrap his head around the idea of someone hurting her that badly.

"What about the other two?" He asked, in an attempt to quell the images running through his head.

"The imperius curse puts the victim completely under the control of the caster"

"Like hypnotism?"

"Sort of, except when someone is hypnotised, they still retain their morals and ethics and so on" Harry looked at him in confusion "So - for example - you couldn't make someone under hypnosis kill themselves, or kill someone else unless they were predisposed to"

"But with the imperius curse, that isn't true?"

"No" Lupin stared down at his student "The caster can make the victim do anything" He voice became flat "Kill, torture, rape - even commit suicide"

"And The Killing Curse?" Harry asked, then his eyes went wide.

"It kills. Instantly" Lupin replied "No pain, no suffering"

"So why..."

"Why is it so bad, when there are spells out there that kill in worse ways?" Harry nodded at Remus' question "Because there is no defence" Remus said simply "If you get hit, you die" He looked up at the scar on Harry's forehead "Only one person in known history has survived it" Harry stared at him in surprise.

"The only one?"

"The only one" They stared at each other in silence for a moment "Can you remember any more of your dream?"

"No" Harry shook his head "It was all confusing"

"Oh" Lupin looked up at the clock "You should go. It's time for lunch"

"Okay. See you later" Harry left the room, anxious to find his friends.

The next morning, the three of them were walking down to breakfast when Hermione stopped.

"I forgot my notes" She turned, and walked back towards the common room. Halfway there, she saw something out of the corner of her eye. She crept into an alcove, and watched as a figure in a hooded cloak crept along the passage towards Gryffindor Tower. He pulled out a wand, and silenced the fat lady, before casting a spell that caused the portrait to swing open.

Hermione held her breath, but apparently the room was empty, because there were no screams forthcoming.

She walked over to the hole, and glanced inside. The cloaked figure was coming down the stairs from the boys dorm, and - from his body language, it seemed he hadn't found what he had been looking for. As she watched, he walked over to the girls' stairs, and started to walk up.

A few seconds later the air was split by the sound of a siren, and Hermione saw the steps turn into a slide. The figure landed in a heap, then stood up, and rushed towards where Hermione was standing.

She ducked to one side, and watched as he rushed out of the common room. As he passed her, she caught sight of his face, and had to restrain a gasp of surprise.

She ran down to the hall, looked around, then rushed over to where Harry and Sally were sat.

"Min? What's wrong?"

"He was here" She whispered.

"Who?"

"Sirius Black"

"When?"

"He was in the common room, searching the dorms" She looked around "The girls as well as the boys"

"Should we tell someone?" Sally asked quietly "I mean - I know Dumbledore is... well - you know. But if Black is in the school..." Harry and Hermione both nodded, then all three of them stood up and walked out of the great hall, and up to the Headmaster's Office.

When they arrived, they stared at the stone gargoyle for a moment.

"How do we get in?" Hermione asked, then they all stared as the stone door moved aside. They walked through it, and up to the Headmaster's Office. Harry knocked, but when there was no reply, he pushed the door open.

"It's empty"

"Should we wait?"

"Come in" A voice came from inside the office, and they walked inside to see The Sorting Hat staring down at them "Miss Perks, Miss Granger, Mr Potter"

"Vanessa?"

"So you remember" The Hat smiled "Yes - that is my name" It looked down at them "Something on your minds?"

"Why do you sound male when you speak?"

"Ah - well. I can sound" The Hat modified its voice to sound female "However I chose"

"Oh"

"Why are you here?" The Hat asked, resuming its normal voice. The three students looked at each other, then Sally spoke.

"Sirius Black is in the school, and we think that whatever he is going to do, he is going to do it tonight"

"Indeed?" The Hat smirked "From what I remember, young Mr Black was not the type to betray his friends. His family - yes, but it wasn't in him to betray the Potters"

"I thought you weren't allowed to tell people about the sortings" Sally said in surprise.

"When did I say that?"

"Last year"

"I did say that, didn't I?" They stared at The Hat for a moment "Hey - I'm nearly a thousand years old. Can I help it if I can't remember the rules from one day to the next?" They continued to stare at it "Okay - they aren't really rules. More like... guidelines" The Hat smiled at them "But I promise you, here and now, I will protect your secrets - all of your secrets - with my life. You may not know it yet, but you three have a destiny, and I, and the school, will help you in any way we can" They all stared at it "Okay - too much information?"

"Maybe a little" Hermione said.

"A destiny?" Sally added.

"It will become clear later" The Hat said quickly "But for now, I suggest you tell The Headmaster nothing. I know the truth about Sirius Black, and about Rupert and Aaron and Michael, but The Headmaster won't care, and will use the situation to further his own ends. Ends which he can not be allowed to pursue"

"So why do we say we came here?"

"I thought I should apologise for my behaviour over The Quidditch Cup" Sally said "Despite the actions of my House, I shouldn't have let the fact the entire school hates me deter me from doing something I excel at on behalf of a group of people who hold me in complete contempt"

The Headmaster stared at her for a moment, then smiled.

"Thank you, Miss Perks" He smiled "Is that all?"

"Yes. Thank you Headmaster"

Chapter 13

Later that evening, the three of them sat in Myrtle's bathroom, wondering what to do about the prophecy Trelawney had given them.

"We know Black is on the grounds, and that he has come back to get another Death Eater" Hermione said "And that, by the end of tonight, he will have returned that person to Voldemort's service"

"But we can stop him" Harry said "If we kill the servant" He looked at the girls "Could you kill someone?"

"No" Sally shook her head "I don't think so" Hermione shook her head in agreement, and looked back at Harry.

"Me neither" He sighed "So - we see if we can stop him, or hold up until the Aurors come?"

"Or we could summon Uncle Mike?" Sally asked "He might be able to help"

"Why not Aunt Susan?" Harry asked in surprise.

"A choice five Lions will have to make" Hermione quoted "Your mother was a Ravenclaw, wasn't she?" Sally nodded, then they both turned to Harry.

"But even if we can get Uncle Mike, it still doesn't answer the most important question - where is he now?"

"He's hiding in the tunnel under the whomping willow" A voice said from behind them. They jumped to their feet, and raised their wands, but lowered them again when they realised it was just a ghost.

"Thank you" Harry said softly "I'm sorry, but I never learned your name"

"I am The Gray Lady"

"I know that" Harry smiled "I mean - your name before you died" The Gray Lady looked at him in surprise "What?"

"No one has ever asked me for my name before" She smiled "My sister was right about you"

"Your sister?"

"I will answer all your questions later, but now - you must go. He will move soon, and if you want to catch him, you must go now"

They stared at her for a moment, then Harry closed his eyes.

"Uncle Mike!" Harry yelled loudly, and a few moments later, Sirius ran in to the room, wand raised.

"What?"

"Sirius Black is apparently waiting in a passage under the whomping willow. Do you know how to get there?"

"Yes, but... it might not be safe for you to go" Sirius frowned "The full moon"

"You think Professor Lupin is there?" Harry shook his head "He said he locks himself in his office"

"I guess that would make more sense" Sirius smiled "So - I can apparate to the shack, and come down the tunnel"

"If you can force him out, we can catch him at the other end"

"What about the dementors? Should you be out of the castle this late?"

"We'll be okay, as long as we don't try to leave the grounds"

"Okay - wait for me by the willow, but keep out of the way of the branches"

"See you soon"

"Are you sure about this?" Hermione asked "What if we are caught?" They were hidden under Harry's invisibility cloak, slowly walking to the main doors.

"If we can catch this person, we could clear his name, and..." Harry trailed off.

"We know" Sally said softly "And we'll do what we can" She felt him squeeze his hand.

They reached the main doors, and crept out of the castle. Taking a quick look around, they then set off for the willow.

"Hold it!" Sirius had crept up behind the man impersonating him "Take out your wand, and put it on the ground" The other man spun round, pulling out his wand as he did "STUPEFY!!" Sirius sighed as the man fell to the ground "Life would be so much easier if people would do what I want" He levitated the unconscious body along the underground passage, and dropped him at the end nearest the willow. He looked up, then turned back to the stunned man.

"Please understand, I mean very little offence. STUPEFY!! STUPEFY!!" He leaned over, felt the imposter's pulse, then slowly looked out of the entrance to the passage. He didn't see anyone, but he pushed against the knot in the tree that Remus had shown him over twenty years before. As expected, the branches stopped waving, and the entire tree froze.

"Uncle Rupert?" A voice called from a few yards away.

"Richard?" Sirius saw the three kids appear "I've got him. Can we go somewhere private?"

"Myrtle's bathroom" Sally said "We can have privacy there"

"Okay" Sirius turned, and levitated the body of the other man, then the kids covered it with the cloak as they set off to the castle.

"What do we have here?" Remus Lupin had been staring out of the window in his office when he had seen the events at the willow. He couldn't identify the figures, but given the number of them, and the way they appeared, he had a fair idea who they were.

He saw them walking back to the castle, and - after looking over at the sunset - decided to go after them.

"ENEVERATE!!" The person impersonating Sirius sat bolt upright after being hit with four spells. He stared around, then looked over at Sirius "We took the liberty of removing your wand, your sword, and the various portkeys you had"

"Where am I?"

"But one thing we did find was this" Sirius waved a glass phial at him "Why would you need veritaserum if you were, as everyone thinks, here to kill my nephew?"

"To see if he knew anything about how my master died"

"Voldemort?" Harry asked, causing the man to flinch.

"So - you still say you are really here to kill Harry?" Sally asked, and the man nodded "I don't believe you" She pulled out her wand, and pointed it at him "Petrificus Totalus!" The man froze.

"So - are you sure you are here to kill my godson?" Sirius asked again.

"Yes"

"I guess we will know soon" Sirius pulled the stopper out of the phial, and poured a little down the man's throat "Give it a minute" He turned to the others "So - why do you think he is here?"

"There is..." Hermione glanced at the petrified man "A suggestion that he is here to take someone back to Voldemort"

"Anyone in particular?"

"We don't know" Sally sighed "But it is someone who served him before - but left him at the end of the war and went in to hiding" Sirius stared at them.

"Where did this suggestion come from?" He asked. Harry glanced pointedly at the frozen prisoner, then shook his head.

"I will tell you later" He said, then turned again to the man in front of them "Do you think he is ready?"

"Let's see, shall we?" Sirius turned "Why did you come here?"

"I was sent to find the traitor"

"Why are you impersonating Sirius Black?"

"Because everyone believes he betrayed the Potters, and that he kidnapped Harry to kill him"

"Who are you?"

"Lucius Malfoy" Everyone gasped.

"And who did you come for?"

"I came for Peter Pettigrew" Harry span round to stare at Sirius, but he held up his hand.

"Pettigrew is in the school?"

"Yes"

"Where?"

"The Gryffindor Tower"

"How has he been hiding in The Tower?" Sally asked.

"He is an animagus - he is a rat. He has been living with a wizarding family since The Dark Lord fell from power"

"Which family?"

"The Weasleys"

"SCABBERS!!" Harry yelled "Ron's pet rat" He continued when Sirius stared at him in confusion.

"Pettigrew is here? Now?" Sirius asked in disbelief. He looked back to Lucius "How have you been getting into the castle?"

"I have had help from another of my Lord's most devoted"

"Who?" There was no reply "Who. Helped. You"

"Severus Snape"

"Ron? Have you seen Harry anywhere?" Ginny looked round the common room.

"No. He and those two trollops he hangs around with haven't been here all night" Ron glared at her "And why do you want to know?"

"I was going to convince him to come and stay with us this summer - maybe come with us to the World Cup"

"Why? He is arrogant, selfish and has no idea about friendship"

"But.. he is Harry!" She sighed "He is all I have ever wanted, all I could ever want" She smiled at him "You know Professor Dumbledore and mum both agree on this, and that they are going to help us" He was about to reply when the portrait hole opened, and Sally came in. She looked around for a moment, then walked over to the two Weasleys.

"I know we have had our differences, but - since we are coming to the end of the year - I was hoping we could finish on a friendly note" They both stared at her in disbelief "What?"

"Why do you think we would want to be friends with you?" Ron sneered at her "Do you think you can come begging on your knees and expect us to give you another chance?"

"I know your mother thinks we should be friends. So does The Headmaster" She glanced at Ginny "And you must know that if you force Harry to choose, it won't be a choice at all"

"So?"

"The three of us are sick of fighting with you" She sighed "We know that Voldemort isn't dead, and that he is going to return. Whether it is tomorrow, or a year from now, he will be back" She looked round, then stood up "And when he comes back, don't you think we would be better working together than fighting each other, as well as him?" She walked back to the portrait hole, and pushed it open. She turned back for a moment "Did you ever wonder WHY Dumbledore

is pushing so far for you two and my Harry to be friends?" She pushed her way out of the common room, and closed the portrait hole behind her. She set off down the corridor, and a few moments later, she heard a voice from her left.

"Did you mean it?"

"Yes"

"Do you think they'll listen?"

"No" She paused "Did you get him?"

"Yes" The hatred in his voice was clear.

"Then let's get back"

The two students walked up to the bathroom, but stopped when they heard a voice behind them. They turned to see Hermione run up the hallway towards them.

"He's gone"

"Snape?"

"Yeah. His office has been packed up, and is empty. I ran in to one of the prefects, and she told me Professor Snape had announced he was leaving for a week" She looked at them "Do you think he knows"

"Seems so" Harry sighed, then held up the stunned rat he was holding "On the other hand, I got the rat"

"Cool!"

"Lets go" They pushed the door open, and came face to face with Remus Lupin. For a moment the four of them stared at each other, then Remus stood aside, and let them in. He sealed the door behind them, then turned to face them.

"Is that him?" He asked, gesturing at the rat.

"Yes"

"Hand him over" Remus held out his hand. Harry hesitated, but then they heard another voice.

"Do it Harry" They looked past Remus to see Sirius stood there - minus his disguise.

"Uncle Mike?" They gaped at him.

"He overheard the interrogation, and realised who I was" Sirius said "He threatened to stun me, and turn me over to Dumbledore, unless I let him wait with me" He looked down at the rat as well "Hand him over, Harry"

Harry passed the stunned rat to Lupin, and watched as it was placed on the ground. Then the DaDa professor turned to Hermione "Miss Granger, do you know the reversal spell?"

"To force an animagus back to human form?" Lupin nodded "I know it, but I haven't ever done it"

"Okay then" Lupin said, then turned and pointed his wand at the lump on the ground "Animus Revert!" A moment later, a grown man was lying on the floor.

"Incarcerous! Enerverate!" Sirius snapped off two spells, then he and Lupin walked over to where Peter was lying, and sat him up "Hello Peter" Sirius said softly.

"Siri... Sirius?" Peter shook his head to clear it "Remus?"

"Peter" Lupin spoke calmly "How've you been?"

"Where am I?" He looked around, and caught sight of the three students. He stared at Harry "Is that... you?"

"Yes" Harry nodded "Hello, Uncle Peter"

"What's going on?" Peter asked, turning back to Remus "What are you doing?"

"Why did you do it, Peter?" Remus stared down at him, still talking in the same, calm voice "James and Lily trusted you. Why would you betray them?"

"It wasn't... I didn't..." He turned and pointed at Sirius "He was their secret keeper. He betrayed them!"

"How DARE YOU!!" Sirius yelled, causing the three students to take a step back. They had never seen him this angry "How dare you suggest I might have betrayed them!"

"You were their secret keeper" Peter yelped "Who else could have done it?"

"We know the truth" Remus said "That you became their secret keeper, on the advice of Sirius. And that you gave them up to Voldemort"

"No! I didn't!" His voice was high-pitched and whiney "I couldn't"

"NO MORE LIES!!" Sirius bellowed "You SWORE to protect them , then you turned the mover to be killed!!" He prowled towards the cowering figure "Tell me, Peter - when you were made secret keeper, did you even think about keeping your promise, or did you go scurrying to Voldemort that same hour?"

"It wasn't... I didn't..."

"Do you know why Lucius is here, Peter?" Remus asked "He was here to find you, and take you back. But first he was going to question you"

"Wh... what does Malfoy want with me?" Peter protested.

"The Death Eaters want you dead, Peter" Sirius sneered "Voldemort went to the Potter's on your information, and he didn't come back. They believe you betrayed him" He stared down at the traitor "But that's why you were hiding, wasn't it?"

"I was hiding from you!" He yelled at Sirius "I knew you would need to blame someone else"

"That's enough!" Remus barked "Peter - we know you betrayed James, Lily and Harry"

"And the whole wizarding world" Harry added.

"And now you have to pay for it" Remus and Sirius raised their wands "Are you going to die with a clear conscience, or are you still

denying the truth?" Peter stared up at them, but before he could continue, Lupin spoke again "You are going to die either way" There was a minute of silence, then Peter shook his head miserably.

"What else was I supposed to do?" He whined "He was everywhere. The Order was being over-run, and we couldn't stand against him! Then Snape told him..."

"Snape?" Hermione asked sharply "Snape told him what?"

"...that only Harry had the power to kill him" He turned to Sirius and Remus "Our only hope was a baby! What else could I do? What would you have done?"

"I would have DIED!!" Sirius yelled again "You should have let them kill you before you betrayed Lily and James!" He raised his wand again, as did Remus "Goodbye, Peter"

"Harry!" Peter turned to the boy "You won't let them kill me. I am defenceless" Harry stared down at him, then turned to Remus and Sirius.

"I don't think my parents would want their two best friends to become killers" He smiled, then his faced turned hard as he looked back at Peter "But then - I wouldn't know, would I?" He turned to his friends "I think it is time we were heading to bed, don't you?" Sally nodded, but Hermione looked uncertain "Min?"

"Killing an unarmed man?" She asked "Isn't that... wrong?"

"He will get the Dementors Kiss" Remus replied "There are those who would say this is a kindness"

"But - how do you know he did it willingly?"

"Sally" Remus said "Pull up his sleeve"

Sally looked at him in surprise, then walked over, and slid up Peter's sleeve, revealing a black tattoo on his arm "The Dark Mark. Voldemort's sign" He turned to Hermione, who was staring at Pettigrew with utter revulsion "I see you understand"

"Harry, Sally" She said, turning to her friends "It's time for bed" She turned and strode out of the bathroom before they could respond.

They stared at Sirius for a moment, then followed her without looking back.

Chapter 14

An hour later, Professor McGonagall marched into the common room, and looked around. When she saw Harry and his friends sat with Ginny and her brothers, she gave a small smile, then walked over to them.

"Mr Potter - the Headmaster would like to see you"

"Is this about Sirius Black, m'am?" Harry asked, causing gasps from those around her.

"Indeed, but from what I have heard, you already know what has happened" She glanced at the rest of the group "Miss Granger and Miss Perks might as well come along, as I suspect you will tell them anyway"

They walked in to the Headmaster's office, and Harry gave a brief smile when he saw Sirius now looked like Michael Whiteheart again, and Lucius Malfoy - still looking like Sirius - was bound to a chair. When he looked around, he saw Minister Fudge and the two other heads of houses stood in the corner.

"Uncle Mike? Where is Professor Lupin?" Sally asked, as the three students walked up beside him.

"He had to return to his office" Sirius said, and gestured to the moon.

"But he is alright?" Harry asked, and Sirius nodded. Harry sighed in relief, then looked around "No Snape?"

"Seems not" Sirius smirked, then the all turned as Dumbledore stood up.

"Now that we are all gathered, perhaps someone would explain why Sirius Black is tied up in a chair, having been captured by my defence teacher and the guardians of one of my students?"

"We heard that this person was on the grounds, and we summoned our Uncle to help apprehend him" Sally said.

"Why didn't you ask the staff for help?" Professor Flitwick asked.

"May I be honest, sir?" Harry asked looking at Dumbledore. The Headmaster nodded, and Harry continued "Sirius Black has been in and out of the school for a year, and no one - not the staff, nor the Aurors - has been able to find him, let alone stop him. So you will forgive us if we thought that we should find another way to capture him" He heard Fudge snort in amusement.

"How did you capture him?"

"I caught him unawares in the tunnel under the whomping willow" Sirius replied "And, on that topic, how can you claim this school is perfectly safe when there is an unguarded tunnel that leads outside the wards?"

"I believe you understand why that is necessary" Dumbledore said, casting an eye at Fudge.

"If you say so, Professor" Sirius smiled at the three students "Anyway - we stunned him, and took him to a place where we could question him. Remus saw us, and came along to provide extra help"

"Why did you not turn him over at once?" McGonagall demanded.

"I think that you of all people, Professor, you and the Headmaster should be the last to talk about working outside the law" Sally said with a frown, then turned to Fudge "Forgive us, Minister, but if we had handed him over to the Aurors, he might have been given to the dementors. We wanted to know what he was doing here" She glanced at Harry "We just wanted to talk to him before he was handed over. Find out what he was doing"

"I understand" Fudge smiled "What did you find out?" The three students turned to Sirius, who smiled, and nodded. He turned to Fudge.

"He didn't come to kill or take Harry" He turned to face the prisoner "He came to get Peter Pettigrew" There were a few gasps "He came to get Peter, and to take him back to Voldemort. Peter was the one who betrayed James and Lily. Peter sold them to Voldemort - he was their secret keeper"

"Perhaps we should discuss this in private" Dumbledore said, looking at Fudge.

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"There might be... sensitive information about..." Dumbledore glanced at Fudge again.

"About what?" Sirius asked "What could we say that you don't want The Minister to know? And why are you so intent on keeping secrets from The Minister?" He glanced at the three kids "What kind of example is that to set for your students! Shame on you!!" He paused "Where was I?"

"Peter was the secret keeper, and Sirius wasn't" Hermione replied.

"Ah yes" Sirius turned back to Fudge "Peter betrayed James, Lily and Harry, and Sirius and Remus. Then he went in to hiding as Ronald Weasley's pet rat"

"He was an animagus?" McGonagall asked in surprise.

"Yes" Sally said "But before you ask, we went to look for him, but he was gone" Harry smiled at her.

"Then we will alert the Aurors to look for him" fudge said, then turned to the figure bound in the chair "And I suppose we can release Mr Black?"

"That isn't Sirius Black, Minister" Sirius replied. Everyone stared at him in disbelief.

"Then who is he?" Fudge asked.

"Let me show you" He pulled out his wand, and pointed it at the man "Finite Incantatum!" They all watched as the spell faded, and became a tall man, with silver hair.

"Lucius Malfoy?" Fudge stare in surprise.

"He is here on Voldemort's orders" Harry said, then turned to stare at The Headmaster "And he has been working with Snape"

"Professor Snape" Dumbledore said, then turned in surprise when Hermione burst in to laughter "Miss Granger?"

"Harry tells you that one of your professors - one of your most trusted professors - has been working with a Death Eater, and all

you can say is 'Professor Snape'?" She walked over to Malfoy and yanked up his sleeve on his robe. The Dark Mark stood out clearly on his arm "He told us Severus Snape is a Death Eater, and that..." She turned to Sirius, who watched her hands for a moment, then nodded "... that Snape gave Voldemort a prophecy..."

"Miss Granger! That's ENOUGH!!" Dumbledore yelled "I have been patient and listened to this fairy tale for long enough, but I think we are done" He turned to the students "Professor Snape is a trusted member of staff - he would not betray me"

"Then where is he?" Sally demanded "We have the heads of Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw - where is the illustrious Head of Slytherin?"

"And we questioned him with this" Sirius passed the veritaserum to Fudge "He and Snape were going to capture Pettigrew, question him and then kill him" He turned back to Dumbledore "But now I think we should turn him over to the Aurors, and let my nephew and nieces go to bed" He smiled at the students fondly "They have had a long day"

"Very well" Fudge said "If you would summon the two Aurors on the front gates, we will escort Mr Malfoy to The Ministry, and question him further" He paused "I will also order the dementors back to Azkaban, as it appears they are no longer needed" He looked over at Sirius "Thank you Mr Whiteheart"

"Mike"

"Thank you Mike - you have done the wizarding world a good service"

"You are welcome" Sirius turned to the students "Lets go"

"He can't be allowed to talk"

"I understand"

"But not in the castle"

"I will ensure he escapes in to the welcoming arms of the dementors"

"Thank you"

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"You probably want to read this" Sally handed the paper to Harry, who looked at the headlines, and swore loudly. He stared up at the staff table, to see Dumbledore smiling down at the paper in front of him.

"I haven't heard from Uncle Mike, or from Minister Fudge" Sally said softly "But I can't see why The Prophet would lie" Harry nodded, and stared down at the paper. The main story said that an unidentified man, believed to be helping Sirius Black, had been kissed by the dementors after escaping from Auror custody the night before.

"You think..." He glanced at the Headmaster.

"He really didn't want Malfoy talking to Fudge" Sally replied "You heard his reaction to Min's comment about the prophecy. But, if it helps, I don't think he had anything to do with the other story"

"No" Harry sighed. The other story on the front page announced in bold letters that Remus John Lupin, the Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts, was a werewolf "My guess is it was Snape - a parting shot since he won't be coming back either" They both looked up as Hermione came in to the hall.

"Lupin's office is packed up and empty - he has gone already" She said in a resigned voice. She looked around, then lowered her voice "Uncle Mike told him the secret last night, and he will be there when we meet"

"Good" Harry smiled, then his face fell as he looked back up the hall at Dumbledore "Will he ever stop?"

"If what Malfoy and Wormtail told us is true" Hermione said softly "Then I think it will only get worse" They stared at the Headmaster in silence, then turned their attention back to the paper.

"The end of another year" Dumbledore stood in front of the students on the last night of term, but as he continued, Harry turned to Sally and Hermione, and the three of them started talking quietly.

"We have to get more organized. Vader's followers are getting themselves sorted out for something big"

"You think he is going to return?"

"Yes" There was a pause "And I think we should be ready"

"And so, I am happy to present both the Quidditch and House Cups to Slytherin" Dumbledore announced, causing cheers and polite applause through the hall. Sally looked up the table to see Ron and Ginny staring back at her.

"I think we are going to have to do something about those two as well" Harry and Hermione followed her gaze, and they both nodded.

The next morning, they boarded the Express, and found themselves a compartment. Sally was about to lock the door when it was pushed open.

"Luna?"

"Hello Harry" She nodded at the others "May I come in?"

"Of course" He waved her to a seat "How are you?"

"I am fine, thank you" She sat down, then she pulled out her wand, locked the door and cast a few privacy spell and silencing spells. Then she turned back to them "I want in. I want to join"

"Join what?" Hermione asked, genuinely surprised.

"Join you" She looked at Harry "You are going to fight Voldemort"

"Voldemort is dead" Sally said carefully.

"You don't really believe that" Luna said, as if she was talking to a child. Sally blushed, causing Harry to smirk. He turned to Luna.

"Luna - what do you think we are going to do?"

"Form a group to fight him" Luna said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world "You already have a werewolf, a number of ghosts and Hogwarts helping you, as well as Sirius Black" After a moment's silence, Harry shook his head.

"I'm sorry Luna, but..."

"Please Harry" She smiled, but it didn't quite reach her eyes "I know most people treat me as if I am stupid, but I don't want you to be one of them" She stared at him pleadingly. He stared back for a moment, then nodded.

"I can't promise anything - I don't even understand how Hogwarts can side with anyone, let alone us, but..."

"But when we find out" Sally said "We will let you know"

Luna beamed at them, and bounced to her feet.

"Thank you" She dispelled all the charms, then skipped down the carriage. They watched her go, then Sally locked the door, and turned back to the other two.

"That was strange" She said. Hermione smiled.

"From what I've seen, and heard, she has been a little... disconnected since her mother died" Hermione sighed "But I have also heard stories that - whatever happened to her on the night her mother was killed - it gave her an insight into life that very few ever have" She glanced at Harry "She knows about Sirius, and she has kept it a secret"

"What do you think?" Harry asked his girlfriend "We put you in charge for a reason, remember"

"I think we can trust her" Sally said "She does owe us, all of us, a life debt, but even without that, I think she could help us in the fight" She looked back at them "Because she is right about that - we are going to fight, aren't we?"

"Yes" Harry smiled at her "And we are going to win"

Half an hour before they were due to arrive at King's Cross, Sally found Luna sat in a compartment on her own, reading a copy of her father's newspaper. The fact she was holding it upside down didn't seem to bother her all that much.

"Luna?"

"Yes Sally?"

"We're still not sure, but if you want in, come to my home in a week's time"

Luna stared at her for a moment, then nodded.

"Have a nice holiday"

"You too"

"MUM!" Sally charged across the station and threw herself in to her mother's arms.

"Hello love" Susan hugged her, and then waved at the other two students as they came over.

"Susan?" Harry looked around "Where's everyone else?"

"Your Uncle asked me to send his apologies, but he had another appointment today" She saw the look of disappointment on his face
"Trust me - once you find out what he is doing, you will be happy"
She looked at her watch "Okay - we are going to drop off all your things at our house, meet up with Auror Finch and her team, and then... well - lets make that a surprise, shall we?" The three students looked at her, then at each other.

"Did you know your mother was crazy?" Harry asked, but before Sally could respond, Hermione nodded.

"Like mother, like... gwargh!" She tried to slap Sally's hand away from her mouth, but failed. Harry watched the interplay with a smile, but then Susan coughed, and they all turned back to her.

"Lets go"

Thirty minutes later, Susan, along with six Aurors, escorted the three students in to The Ministry of Magic.

"We are with The Minister's party" Susan said, and a moment later an aide lead them off to a room, and escorted them to a raised stage.

"If you would like to take a seat, someone will be with your shortly" The Aurors spread out behind them, while Susan indicated they should sit down.

"Mum?"

"Trust me"

A few minutes later, the doors at the back of the hall opened, and around twenty reporters came in and sat down in front of the stage. After they had settled down, Susan stood up and walked to the podium in the center of the stage.

"I have been asked to announce that Quick Quote Quills are not permitted at this news conference. Anyone who is using one, please put them away" She watched the group in front of her, then turned and nodded to someone stood at the side of the hall "Ladies and gentlemen - The Minister Of Magic" She turned and went back to her seat, but - along with everyone else, remained standing as Cornelius Fudge came in to the room, accompanied by Amelia Bones.

"Thank you all for coming" Fudge said, gesturing for everyone to sit down "A year ago, I announced that the wanted fugitive Sirius Black was, once again, a threat to the wizarding world" He paused "I am happy to say that that is no longer the case" He turned to look at Harry, Hermione and Sally "Thanks to the heroic acts of these three students, we have not only been able to catch the man who was terrorising our world, but also to correct a grave injustice that has been going on for nearly fourteen years" Harry's mouth fell open in surprise, and he turned to Susan with a questioning look. She smiled, nodded and pointed to the side of the hall.

"Ladies and gentlemen - to tell you his own story, pay I present Mr Sirius Lee Black" The crowd fell silent as Sirius - minus the disguise

of Michael - walked up to the podium. For a moment, he simply stared at the crowd, then he smiled.

"It's good to be back"

Chapter 15

"Are there any more questions?" Fudge asked, looking around. The news conference had been going on for nearly an hour, and, after telling his story, Sirius had been answering all the reporters' questions very patiently.

"Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet" A woman said from the back "I was wondering if Mr Potter would like to comment on his godfather's story?" Sirius looked across at Harry, who shrugged.

"I think we should limit the questions to Mr Black for the moment" Fudge said with a smile. Rita frowned, but nodded "If that is all?" No one else asked a question, so he continued "Thank you all for coming"

"Albus - there is something you should see" The Headmaster looked up at his deputy "It is about Harry and Sirius Black"

"So - Uncle Sirius" Harry said with a smile "What would you like to do now?"

"Well - I need to talk to Susan, Director Bones and Minister Fudge, so if you three could wait a little while longer, I will take you all for ice-cream when we are done"

"Okay" He glanced at Sally's mother, then back at Sirius.

"I promise I will tell you later"

Dumbledore threw the parchment down, and cursed loudly. All of his plans for Harry's future were now in tatters - Sirius Black would never, ever give up his guardianship of his godson, and Dumbledore had no doubt that - with Black's return to the wizarding world - the Potters' will would be read, granting Black formal adoption rights to the boy.

And, if the letter from his contact at The Ministry was anything to go by, Fudge was squarely in the Black-Potter camp, and would be no help at all.

He leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes. Black would not go along with him - the actions of Michael Whiteheart, and Harry himself, made that clear. And, he reflected, his attempts to run roughshod over Harry's "American Uncle" hadn't worked, and had instead alienated the two of them to an alarming degree.

He picked up a quill, and a new piece of parchment. It seemed, he thought, that he would have to try another approach.

The next morning, Harry sat down for breakfast with Sirius, and noticed he was frowning at a letter he was holding.

"Uncle Mike?"

Sirius looked up and smirked at him.

"Sorry - force of habit. What's wrong?"

"Letter from Dumbledore" Sirius waved the parchment "He heard about my... my return to decent society, and wanted to come and talk to the both of us" He skimmed over the letter again "I think he has realised that, short of killing me, he can't get you away from me, and is now trying another approach to gaining some control over you"

"What do you want to do?" Harry asked.

"If it's okay with you, I was going to write back and tell him that we would get back to him in the near future - that because of the change in circumstances, we will need some time to get used to our new lives"

"Do you think he'll believe it?"

"Who cares?" Sirius smiled "Sally, Susan and the Grangers are coming over in half an hour. Susan and I have something to tell you" He saw Harry's mouth fall open in surprise "What?"

"You and Aunt Susan... you..." Harry couldn't think how to phrase the question. Sirius watched him stutter, then burst out laughing.

"No, Harry - Susan and I are not getting married, dating or otherwise involved"

"Thank god for that" Harry sighed in relief, then - at the look on his godfather's face, continued "The idea of you dating my girlfriend's mother..." He shuddered.

"Ah... well" Sirius paused with a slight smile on his face "We aren't dating as such, but... well - you will see" He couldn't help but smirk at the look on Harry's face.

"Harry. Sally. At the start of the school year, Susan and I agreed to share custody of both of you" Sirius told the assembled group "When the fake me as on the loose, I was concerned that I might be detained by The Ministry, or worse" He looked at Harry "And I was scared that - if that happened - Dumbledore would be given guardianship, and I couldn't allow that to happen"

"And Sally?" Hermione asked.

"I was equally concerned about Sally's future if anything happened to me" Susan replied "If Dumbledore gained power over her..."

"Anyway - before we left The Ministry yesterday, Susan and I refiled the papers with Director Bones and Minister Fudge" Sirius smiled "We now share joint custody of you both, under my original and proper name"

"Does this mean we are moving here?" Sally asked in surprise.

"No" Susan shook her head, then when Sirius nodded, she added "It would only be invoked if..."

"If one of you dies" Sally finished seriously.

"Yes" Susan put her arm around her daughter "It is just a precaution - one that we hope we won't need" Sally and Harry shared a moment of hand-signaled communication, then they both turned back to the adults.

"We understand" Harry said, then added "This doesn't mean we are brother and sister, does it?"

For the second time in a week, Dumbledore flung a parchment down on his desk. The reply from Sirius and Harry wasn't what he had wanted, and it seemed that, despite Sirius' new name, he wasn't going to be gaining a new attitude any time soon.

Then there was the matter of the prophecy. From what had been said the night Malfoy was captured, it was clear that Harry, and the rest of his little band, knew the prophecy existed, and at least the first part of it. And that meant they knew he had attempted to oblige the knowledge of it from Harry and Sally's minds.

For the first time in his life, Dumbledore was unsure how to proceed. He needed a way to regain Harry's trust, and to make sure the boy would start to look upon him as a mentor. Partly because of the coming storm - Voldemort would return, and Harry was the only one who could kill him, yet the boy was woefully under prepared to complete his task, but also because of who Harry was. The Boy Who Lived might not have any interest in politics at the moment, but as the Heir To The House Of Potter, and future Heir To The House Of Black, Harry would wield almost unprecedented political power, and Dumbledore did not want that power turned against him.

To distract himself from these thoughts, he picked up the dispatches from The Ministry, and suddenly his eyes lit up. The Tri-Wizard Tournament! That was how he could regain Harry's trust!

He put the parchments down. He had much to do, and not enough time to do it.

Harry looked around the room, and then turned to Sirius and smiled. His godfather nodded back, then turned to face the group.

"You are all here for one reason - because my nephew and nieces trust you with their lives" He looked at the others "Remus - my old friend. You saved their lives, and exposed the impostor" He turned to the young girl on the sofa "Miss Lovegood - you kept my secret for two years, and have been friends with Harry, Sally and Hermione

"when the rest of the school turned against them" He turned again "And Miss Myrtle Harker - you have helped train them to fight the fight we all know is coming, and did not betray them to Dumbledore" The ghostly figure gave a slight bow. Sirius returned it, then continued.

"We all know that Voldemort is going to return. This year - next year, we don't know, but we all know it will happen. And what that will mean to our world, and to those within it" He looked over at Susan and Sally, then Remus and Harry.

"Dumbledore knows this as well, but our venerable Headmaster appears to be more concerned with gaining control over my godson. The Order Of The Phoenix lies dormant, despite the Death Eater attacks that Lucius lead. And we - Harry, Sally, Min and I, believe Dumbledore had Lucius executed to protect himself and his secrets" There were a few murmurs of disbelief.

"We will explain more of this later. More about Voldemort's history, and about our suspicions about our beloved Headmaster. But what we - the seven of us" He gestured to the three kids, Susan and Hermione's parents "Want to know is if you are willing to join us" The visitors stared at them, then Remus spoke up.

"Join you in what?"

"Moony - I am glad you asked" Sirius turned, and raised his wand. A moment later, a large, red V appeared in the middle of the room.

"Voldemort believes that Harry is the only one that can kill him, and it appears that Dumbledore believes that too"

"Do you, Harry?" Remus asked gently.

"I don't know" Harry replied "But whether I believe it or not doesn't matter. He will come for me - and he will try to kill me again and again, until one of us is dead"

"So - we have been training" Hermione said "Learning to work as a team, learning new spells, better ways to fight"

"They are good" Myrtle said, sounding serious "The best in the year, maybe even the school"

"Really?" Harry sounded surprised, and Myrtle nodded in confirmation "Wow"

"The four of us" Sirius indicated the adults "Are going to help them any way we can, but we suspect they will do most of the fighting" He sighed "But we are all going to work against him, when he rises" He looked at the others.

"We want you to help, with whatever information, knowledge, skills and so on that you can provide" He held his hand up before they could speak "We don't have any expectations, that's not why we are asking. We are asking because we trust you, and believe you would want to help us in anyway you can"

"What would we have to do?"

"Do you all know occlumency?" Sally asked, and then looked questioningly at them when they all laughed.

"Ghost"

"Werewolf"

"Crazy girl"

"Oh" Sally looked confused "I get the ghost part, but..."

"The wolf inside me makes my mind impossible to read through legilimency" Remus said.

"And..." Luna trailed off "Daddy says that I am naturally immune" She looked at Sirius "You can try, if you want, but it might give you a bad headache" Sirius stared at her, then shook his head.

"I will take your word for it, Miss Lovegood"

"Luna"

"Luna" He held up his wand "The only other thing is a secrecy oath - swear on your magic not to reveal our order, or its secrets, without the permission of Sally, Harry or Hermione"

"Not you?" Remus asked in surprise.

"I'm not the one in charge" Sirius nodded towards Sally, who blushed. Luna took out her wand, as did Remus. Myrtle held up her hand.

"I can't swear, but I do promise" She said "But, if it makes you feel better, there isn't a lot that anyone can do to compel me to talk, and if they do, I will simply move on to the other side"

"Okay" Sally said, smiling. She turned to Remus and Luna "We are called The Order Of V" She listened as they swore their oaths, then added "Luna - if you want to tell your father, you can, but I would ask that he come to us, and we will tell him"

"Thank you" Luna smiled "I didn't want to keep it a secret from him"

"So..."

"Why did I swear?" She asked. Sally nodded "Because you are my friends" There was a moment of silence, then Remus looked at the V, still floating in the center of the room.

"So - what does the V stand for?" He asked.

"What do you think?" Sirius returned.

"Victory" Remus said.

"Vengeance" Myrtle added.

"Vendetta" Sally looked at Harry.

"Vanquishers" He smiled.

"Vindication" Hermione said.

"Veritas" Susan continued.

For a moment, the room fell silent, then Luna raised her hand.

"Yes, Luna?"

"How about the Venerable Vanquishers for the Veritable Vendetta of Vengeance, Victory and Vindication Of Veritas over the vile, venal and vicious villain Voldemort" Everyone stared at her with varying degrees of disbelief, so she added "Or do you think that's too short?"

